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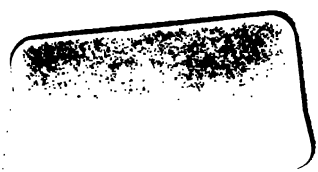

EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY,

DERIVED FROM

ITS NATURE AND RECEPTION.

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DERIVED FROM

ITS NATURE AND RECEPTION.

BY

JOHN BIRD SUMNER,

ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

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PREFACE.

THE republication at the present time of a treatise written nearly forty years ago, has been suggested by the volume of "Essays and Reviews," to which general attention has been lately drawn. Though there is nothing in that volume to disturb established faith, there is much which is calculated to leave a certain class of readers in a state of doubt and perplexity, equally inconsistent with safety and with comfort. Many persons are cast upon the world, and engaged in the business of active life, who have never seriously examined the foundations of the religion to which they nominally belong. They treat it with respect, they acknowledge the benefits which it confers upon society; but vague notions of uncertainty in its evidence, and of difficulties in its doctrines, float upon the mind, and keep them in an unprofitable state of hesitation.

Meanwhile, a volume is put forth by persons of

known talent and position, which insinuates that the leading events recorded in the Bible have been disproved by recent discoveries in science and history; which casts doubts upon the received interpretation of Scripture as irreconcilable with "scientific criticism;" and which rejects as wholly incredible the testimony on which the Gospel revelation was made known to the world, and is now received by Christians. A work of this kind, issuing from those who might rather be expected to defend the Scriptures than to impugn their authority, can hardly fail to have an injurious effect; and may seem to justify the neglect, at least, of a revelation against which so much has been said by persons who might be supposed to be impartial and disinterested judges.

There can be no doubt that this, like other attacks upon Christianity, will result in producing fresh confirmation of its divine authority. There can be no doubt of this sceptical volume receiving such answers as shall reduce it to its proper level. Many such have already appeared. The Author of our religion Himself appealed to proofs, when He required the Jewish nation to believe that He "came forth from God;" and Christianity has never shrunk from the "free handling" of the evidence on which

its claim to be believed depends. But *believed* it must be, that it may avail to any soul. Christianity is everything, or nothing. For any practical purpose, it must be rejected altogether, or embraced altogether. If Jesus Christ is not the Son of God, he is not the Redeemer of the world. But if he is really what the history represents him, "there is no other name under heaven given amongst men, whereby we may be saved."

This it is the more necessary to bear in mind, because it is the system of neological or rationalistic writers to keep it out of sight. Without actually denying the truth of Christianity, they argue about it as if it were a fiction; and professedly remain within the building, whilst they are, in fact, undermining its foundations.

Now, the object of the following treatise is to show that the foundations stand sure; that the truth of the Gospel is established by the Gospel itself; by the internal evidence contained in its own nature, and by the acknowledged fact of its reception in the world. The idea of "an external revelation" may be repudiated; supernatural interference with the order of nature may be pronounced incredible. But still there remains a miracle which

defies all doubt, and refutes all sophistry: The Christian religion exists. How came it to exist, unless the events took place which account for its origin and promulgation?

This is the idea which I have endeavoured to carry out and expand. The argument has, at least, one advantage—it leads to the consideration of the religion itself. And much of the scepticism which prevails would be removed, if the Bible itself were studied, rather than discussions about the Bible.

April, 1861.

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THE EVIDENCE,

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.—ON THE ORIGIN OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

A BOOK is put into my hands, professing to give an account of a revelation from God. I find this revelation established as the religion of my country, under the name of CHRISTIANITY. I find the laws acknowledging it, and taking cognizance of any very gross insults against its divine authority. I find a maintenance, secured by law, for ministers who teach, explain, and enforce it. I see a great variety of persons, who do not receive or claim any participation in that public maintenance, also endeavouring to extend a belief in its truth, and an observance of its precepts.

A slight acquaintance with the nature of Christianity, assures me also, that such a religion is expedient for the public good. It teaches men to consider

themselves as placed under the eye of their Creator. It declares the importance of human conduct and character to be such, as to have occasioned the interference of a Divine Person, called the Son of God. It demands a very pure morality. Wherever it is received, it regulates the lives and habits of men by sanctions so awful, as must affect and influence all that are capable of extending their view to things future and invisible.

These circumstances, however, though they may justly be considered as presumptions in favour of the truth of Christianity, are not decisive. It is a presumption in its favour, that our ancestors should have made Christianity a part of the constitution of the State; because we are entitled to suppose that they had reason for what they did. It is in its favour, that they should have provided for its support and extension; and that so many persons should take an evident interest in its success. It is still more in its favour, that its doctrines should be beneficial to the morality and happiness of men. But then I find some of these circumstances on the side of other religions also. The ancient inhabitants of Europe had a religion prior to Christianity, which they maintained at a considerable expense of statues, sacrifices, temples, and ministers. They defended this religion carefully. Their wisest men, though they perceived its absurdity, still supported it, on the express ground of its utility to the State. Again, the religion of

Mohammed is established over an immense and populous region; and has its priests and temples, publicly acknowledged and maintained. The Hindoos and the Chinese have a religion and a priesthood, whose authority is acknowledged, and who have powerful influence over the people. In fact, no civilized country exists without some form of religion; the members of which, whatever it be, are no less vehement in its support, and often no less confirmed in its belief, than the professors of Christianity. The morality, indeed, of these religions is very different from that of the Gospel, and their effect upon the mind and upon the happiness of their votaries very different. But as the moral state of different nations, independent of religion, is also unequal; the purer morality and general superiority of the Gospel may, it is possible, have arisen from the exercise of a nobler intellect, and from a happier combination of circumstances, and are not alone a sufficient reason for my embracing it as divine. England has a better religion than Turkey or Hindostan. But then England has made a far greater advance in arts and sciences; has a wider field of literature; is in every respect a more enlightened country; and its superior religion may be no more a result of divine interference, than its better constitution and more equal laws. Besides which, the Gospel, in proportion as it is purer than the religions of Brahma or Mohammed, demands greater sacrifices; and requires, therefore, to be con-

firmed by a proportionate force of evidence. And I cannot but be aware, that although this religion is countenanced by the State, and defended by the laws, and cordially believed by many; yet it is also disbelieved by many, neglected by more, and openly assailed by some.

For these reasons, I must have a stronger ground for believing Christianity, than that it is the established religion of my own age and country. This fact, together with its obvious utility to the public morals, may secure my respect to its institutions, and my compliance with its forms. But if I am required to go further, I must inquire deeper, and have a surer foundation of my faith. And the slightest consideration shows me, that I am bound to make this inquiry; and that if I neglect Christianity unexamined, I neglect it at my peril.

I must, therefore, trace back this revelation to its origin. It may not have had the origin to which it pretends. But it must have had some origin. As there are those who deny its origin to have been divine, what other account is given of its existence? It is not enough to speak generally of the New Testament as an imposture, a fiction; although such, if not true, it must have been. But an imposture must have had designers: a fiction must have been framed. Who and what were those who framed it? And how did they succeed? how prevail to get their fabrication recognized?

Pursuing this inquiry, I find that the origin of Christianity, as declared in its own records, is briefly this. About eighteen hundred years ago, a person, born in one of the provinces of Judea, went through that country, and attracted attention by the exercise of supernatural powers. He represented himself as the Son of God, having been born out of the usual course of nature, and sent of the Father in compassion for the state of the world, lying under the condemnation of sin. He instructed those, who flocked to him, in the rules of life which they should observe, and the dispositions they should cultivate; and promised to all, who should believe and obey him, everlasting happiness in a future state. After a short period of time, probably three years, passed in this manner, he was put to death, at the instigation of the chief persons among the Jews; but not until he had predicted this event, and declared it to be an essential part of the mystery of his incarnation; and not until he had attached to himself a certain number of disciples, and given directions for their disseminating and establishing in the world the religion which he had introduced and founded.

Now, is there any certainty that this indeed took place at the time and in the manner which the history records? Antichristian writers, I observe, affect to throw an air of obscurity over the first appearance and promulgation of the religion. One of them asserts, that the system was gradually formed

out of what he calls the chaos and anarchy of the three first centuries. And others generally assume, that the testimony to the introduction of Christianity is confined to the Church itself, which must not be solely trusted in its own cause.

The grand point is, to obtain something definite: we cannot lean upon a shadow. At what time did the religion of Jesus Christ supersede what was believed before? We know that it exists, and is established, now; but we know likewise, that it did not always exist; that it gradually took the place which had been occupied by Judaism and Paganism, and flourished upon their ruins.

There is, however, indisputable testimony that the religion was first preached and received at a time which exactly corresponds with the death of its Founder, as related in the Scriptures. We have no occasion, on this head, to appeal to the Church: that is, to rely on Christian writers alone. The foreign and collateral testimony fails in no point where it can be reasonably demanded. It has, indeed, been the fashion to complain of the silence or inattention of the contemporary historians, as to what has since assumed such vast importance. But the truth is, that they are not silent. They are not, indeed, full: but they tell us all that we require, and all which they could be expected to tell. As early as the time of Claudius, who died within twenty years of the crucifixion of Jesus, Christians had occasioned some

confusion even in the city of Rome, so that the Emperor thought it necessary to expel them from the city. This we learn from the Roman historian ;[1] who also relates, in his biography of Nero, reckoning it among his praiseworthy actions, that he inflicted punishment on the Christians, a race of men following a new and pernicious superstition. This agrees with the account of the contemporary annalist Tacitus, according to whom, within thirty years of the death of Christ, his disciples at Rome were numerous enough to be well known and distinguished in that populous city, and generally styled *Christians*, after the name of their Founder; who, he adds, was put to death in the reign of Tiberius, by his Procurator, Pontius Pilate. The same author proceeds to describe the sufferings which they endured from the tyranny of Nero, who endeavoured to divert from himself the accusation of having set fire to his capital, and to fix the stigma upon them.[2]

Another sort of collateral evidence, equally unexceptionable, is furnished by a long epistle of Clement, Bishop of Rome, which was addressed by him to the Corinthian Christians, about fifty years after the death of Jesus: the whole tenour of which proves

[1] See Suetonius in Claud. 25; and compare Acts xviii. 2. The Emperor, he says, banished *the Jews* from Rome; who, *impulsore Chresto* made continual tumults. Christianity passed at first among the heathens for a sort of Judaism; a mistake easily accounted for; as also the error of the common word χρεστος, for the uncommon χριστος.

[2] Tacitus, Annal. xv. 44.

that the society of Christians had been long established in that city. Several letters of another bishop, Ignatius, dated twenty-five years later, confirm the same point, with regard to many Christian communities in Asia. About the same period we have similar testimony from Pliny, proconsul under Trajan, who describes the Christian churches in Bithynia and Pontus, as consisting of many of all ages and of both sexes; and calls the religion a contagious superstition, which has spread not only through cities, but over villages and the whole country.[1]

To this open testimony it would be easy to add allusions, more or less clear, from almost every writer of note during that period whose works have remained. But my only object was to show that we have firm ground to set out upon. If Christians were known as a tangible body in Rome, upon whom a popular stigma might be attached, within twenty years of the date assigned for the death of Jesus; and if they could be collectively addressed in epistles sent to various parts of Greece and Asia; and if within seventy years of the same event they could be described as "a vast multitude, numbers of every age, of both sexes;"[2] it is quite clear that we may assume the date to which the origin of Christianity is commonly referred, as one which is probably exact

[1] Epist. Lib. x. Ep. 91.

[2] Ingens multitudo, multi omnis ætatis, utriusque sexûs.—PLINY.

to a year, and even a day; but which cannot possibly be materially wrong.

2. Having settled this preliminary question, we come to another of more importance respecting the Author of this religion. Did such a person as Jesus exist, or no? Antichristian writers do not seem to have made up their mind upon this point. Some assert that he did exist, and some that he did not:[1] and others, strange to say, suppose both.[2] And the reader, into whose hands this treatise may fall, must make up his mind one way or other. The religion may be an imposture, though Jesus did exist. But it must have been an imposture, if he did not: if his name were merely ascribed, like those of Hercules or Bacchus, to adventures which never took place; or, like that of Brahma, to doctrines which had no divine authority.

On the supposition, however, that no such person

[1] Volney, who accounts for the origin of Christianity in the following summary way: "The great Mediator and first Judge was expected, and his advent desired, that an end might be put to so many calamities. This was so much the subject of conversation, that *some one was said to have seen him*; and a rumour of this kind was all that was wanting to establish a general certainty. The popular report became a demonstrated fact. The imaginary being was realized; and all the circumstances of mythological tradition being in some manner connected with this phantom, the result was a regular and authentic history, which from henceforth it was blasphemous to doubt." Such is infidelity!

[2] Paine, in different parts of his "Age of Reason." I should not notice such writers as these, if anything more rational had been advanced by others.

ever really existed, but was merely an allegorical or imaginary personage, or the hero of a romantic tale, we must believe what follows; we must believe, that a company of persons undertook to persuade their countrymen that a man had grown up and lived among themselves, and had rendered himself conspicuous by his works and doctrines, and had at last been put to death at the most solemn and frequented festival of their own nation;—when no such person had ever been executed, or even seen, or heard of. And more, that they did persuade their countrymen to believe all this. For the first Christians were converts from the city in which the principal scene was laid, and became so at the very time when these transactions were said to have happened.

It is disagreeable to speak of the Gospel as an imposture. I am sure that many, who do not in any real sense believe it, would start at the idea of using so harsh a term. But we must not deceive ourselves. If Jesus did not exist, nay, further, if he were not, indeed, the Son of God, it is an imposture. Those, therefore, who framed it, must have considered how they could in the surest and easiest manner deceive the world. And certainly they would not begin by asserting such a fact as the birth, public ministry, and execution of a man who had never been born, or known to teach, or put to death at all. Still less could a religion, founded on such false assertions, be received and prevail, in the very place and from the very

time when these things were said to have occurred.

The ground, then, which a sceptic must take, who means his statements or opinions to be examined, is, that Jesus did exist, and that the main circumstances of his history are true; but that with respect to his divinity, or his divine mission, he probably deceived himself; but certainly he deceived others, when he persuaded them to worship him, and to teach a religion under his authority and name.

I will consider the question on this ground. I will take the life, ministry, and public execution of Jesus as an historical fact. It may be denied; as men may deny anything which they do not actually see, or hear, or feel. But it has this advantage over every other historical fact; that it has been regularly attested by persons believing it, and staking all that was most valuable to them upon its truth, from the date assigned for its occurrence to the present hour. It is not extravagant to say, that no memorial which was ever preserved of any past event has a thousandth part of the same title to be trusted, as the memorial of the life and death of Jesus, which is the Christian religion. The only account, therefore, which can be reasonably given of the origin of Christianity, considered as an imposture, is to suppose that Jesus, having attracted some attention and raised a party in Judea, during his life, with hopes which were cut short by his execution;—his followers, from some

unknown motive, conspired to introduce a new religion, of which Jesus was made the author and head; and attributed to him such adventures, endowments, and doctrines, as might best suit their object.

It were too much to say, that this was impossible; and the phenomenon before us, the existing religion, if its origin were not indeed divine, is to be accounted for on this supposition, and on no other.

CHAPTER II.

OPPOSITION OF CHRISTIANITY TO THE OPINIONS PREVAILING AMONGST THE JEWS.

WHAT objection is there to the supposition stated at the conclusion of the preceding chapter, viz., that a party of Jews fabricated the religion, which they set out to teach in the name and under the authority of Jesus?

Before this question can be answered, we must consider the nature of the religion, and of the people among whom it originated, and to whom it was proposed. Truth is lost in generalities. Anything may appear possible, or even probable, on cursory reflection, concerning a distant country, and when eighteen centuries have intervened. But whoever is in earnest, and afraid to be mistaken or deceived in so serious a question, must not lose himself in an imaginary period of confusion or anarchy, but carry himself back to the time and place where the religion originated which it is supposed so easy to fabricate.

The scene of what is related in the Gospel is laid in Jerusalem. And there seems no room to deny that the disciples of Jesus were there first formed into

a company, and set out from thence to promulgate the religion. We shall be assisted in our judgment, by considering what was the state of Jerusalem at this time, as to size, civilization, religion, and popular opinion.

Jerusalem, at this period, was a city of considerable population. It was also a place of great resort, for those especially whose minds had been in any degree awakened to the subject of religion. Jews of wealth, talent, or learning, who were spread in the course of their various pursuits over the continent of Asia, were drawn annually to the capital of their nation, for the purpose of legitimate worship in the temple of their ancestors.[1] And we incidentally learn, that foreigners also, who had never embraced the law of Moses, but had become acquainted through the Jewish Scriptures with a purer faith and a more rational worship than prevailed around them, were often attracted to the metropolis of the religion which they had learned to hold in veneration.[2]

We perceive at once, that in a place like this, the idea of introducing a new religion is more likely to have occurred, than in a country wholly barbarous and unenlightened. At the period in question there was more probability of such an adventure being undertaken in Greece or Italy, than in Britain or Gaul. But it does not follow that the attempt was more likely to succeed. Men's minds are pre-

[1] Acts ii. 5. [2] Acts viii. 27.

occupied; and every novel opinion, before it can establish itself, must dislodge a system already in possession.

At the period we speak of, three remarkable sects are known to have existed in Jerusalem, which divided the attachment of the people, according to their several dispositions.

The Pharisees adhered strictly to the letter of the Mosaic law, and even united to it works of supererogation, fasts, abstinences, and mortifying devotions, to which they ascribed a high degree of importance. Hence they were respected generally by the lower classes, who are commonly disposed to venerate austerity;[1] and as it may be believed, were followed by that large majority who in all countries are willing to compound for the want of spiritual religion by a strict observance of prescribed ceremonies.

The Sadducees denied any future state, any resurrection of soul or body. A lax morality could not fail to attend such opinions, especially when maintained in defiance of the Jewish Scriptures. These had fewer followers; but those were important from their rank and opulence.

The Essenes, though few in number, at least in Judea,[2] were remarkable for the singularity of their

[1] Τοις δημοις πιθανωτατοι τυγχανουσι.—Jos.

[2] Josephus says, 4000. The greater part of this peculiar sect resided in Egypt. See Plin. Nat. Hist. v. 17.

tenets and habits. They maintained the immortality of the soul; but seem to have borrowed their ideas upon that subject from Pythagoras, rather than the Scripture. They held their public worship separately, and in some respects differently, from the rest of their countrymen. They professed the most exemplary strictness of morals. But the peculiar characteristic of the sect was, an entire community of goods, and the austerest celibacy: so that their number was chiefly maintained by the accession of persons advanced in life, who were disgusted with its cares, or wearied by misfortune.[1]

These are the religious classes which existed in Judea, at the time when the Gospel was first preached. But it does not appear that those who introduced that religion belonged to any of these sects; they betray no attachment to any of their peculiar doctrines; they rather oppose them all; not, indeed, systematically, like the partisans of a different faction, but wherever their tenets are contradictory to enlightened reason, or inconsistent with the general good of mankind. If not actually biassed towards any sect, we might expect, as a matter of precaution, that they would seek the countenance and support of some who were in possession of public favour; would try to engage on their side some of those who were opulent, or powerful, or respected in

[1] See Joseph. Antiq. xiii. 5; xviii. 1. Bell. Jud. ii. 8. Philo Frag. p. 632, v. i. Ed. Mangey.

their nation. But the plan which they pursue is directly opposite to all this. Their religious precepts are equally directed against the self-indulgence of the rich; against the pride and hypocrisy of the Pharisees; against the immoral and degrading principles of the Sadducees; against the unsocial and levelling tenets of the Essenes.

In all human appearance, this was to set at work against the system which they were introducing a counteracting influence which must at once be fatal to its progress. Unknown and unprotected men, entering upon a new and hazardous enterprise, begin by arming against themselves all the learning, power, wealth, and influence existing in their country.

This is an important point, and requires to be accurately examined. The Gospel was engrafted upon the Jewish religion. The Jews, we know, derived from their religion very peculiar sentiments; certain national opinions and prejudices were universally received among them, in which every sect agreed. Did the Christian religion agree or disagree with these prevailing opinions? because upon this question the probability of its being a Jewish invention, or of its being embraced by any of that people, will materially depend.

I. There is no doubt that, at the time when Jesus appeared, the Jews were expecting a prophet, or king, or deliverer, known from their ancient writings under the title of the Messiah. This expectation had

even extended to other parts of the East. Such a belief is implied in the inquiry of the Magi who came to Jerusalem to pay homage, asking, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" We read, too, of "devout men," who were "waiting for the consolation of Israel." All were desiring "one who should come." He was anticipated, moreover, under the very title which Jesus assumed. The Samaritan woman spoke the general opinion, when she said, "I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things."[1] And the impression produced by the appearance of Jesus is represented as this; "Come, see a man which told me all that ever I did: is not this the Christ? When Christ cometh, will he do greater things than these?"[2]

Now, suppose the case assumed: that a person, with no divine commission, resolved to claim to himself the character of the expected Messiah. He would lay hold of the popular hope of such an appearance, as the most reasonable chance of his success. Such an expectation would be likely to go far towards accomplishing the event to which it referred.[3] Therefore he would ascertain what sort of a deliverer his

[1] John iv. 25. [2] John v. 29.

[3] Volney treats this as so certain and important, that he thinks little else necessary in order to account for the origin of Christianity, than to be able to assert, that a mediator or deliverer was expected, who should relieve the nation from its present calamities. See the quotation, p. 9.

nation anticipated, and assimilate himself as nearly as possible to that character.

But it happens very unaccountably, that the actual character of Jesus was directly opposed to the expected character of the Messias. The people looked for a conqueror, a temporal king: and had been accustomed to interpret in this sense all the prophecies which foretold his coming. And whether we suppose Jesus to have been impostor or enthusiast, this is the character which he would naturally assume. If he were an enthusiast, his mind would have been filled with the popular belief, and his imagination fired with the national ideas of victory and glory. If he were an impostor, the general expectation would coincide with the only motive to which his conduct can be attributed, an ambitious desire of personal aggrandizement.

How, then, can we explain his rejecting from the first, and throughout his whole career, all the advantage which he might have derived from the previous expectation of the people, and even his turning it against himself and his cause? Why should he, as a Jew, have interpreted the prophetic Scriptures differently from all other Jews? Why should he, as an impostor, have deprived himself of all personal benefit from his design?

We are told, that when he perceived that they would come, and "take him by force to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself

alone."[1] His uniform practice was in agreement with his declaration, "My kingdom is not of this world."[2] Being asked by the Pharisees, "When the kingdom of God should come: he answered, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation.[3] Neither shall they say, Lo here, and lo there; for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you."[4]

The writers of his history were well aware how entirely the real appearance of Jesus differed from all previous expectations of the Messiah. They describe him as losing no opportunity of removing the popular notions from the minds of his followers. "From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee."[5] It was incompatible with their notions of a Messiah, that such a fate should befall him. And Peter's mind was not yet weaned from his national prepossessions. So, likewise, when it might have been supposed that experience of his doctrine and ministry would have established juster views, the "mother of two of the disciples requested that her two sons might sit, the

[1] John vi. 15. [2] John xviii. 36.
[3] Or, outward show, Marg. Μετα παρατηρησεως.
[4] Luke xvii. 30. [5] Matt. xvi. 21, 22.

one on his right hand, and the other on his left, in his kingdom."[1] Even to the latest discourse which is recorded, the idea still remained; and "his disciples asked of him, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom unto Israel?"[2]

Here, then, is conduct which is inexplicable on the supposition of imposture. Opinions are combated, which would have been peculiarly advantageous to the design; and a character is maintained, which was alike self-denying and unpopular. And the natural conclusion on this head is strengthened by historical fact. Several impostors did appear in Judea, relying upon the general expectation; and they uniformly claimed to themselves temporal power and authority. Theudas, whose insurrection is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, appears, by the way in which he is there spoken of, to have founded a political disturbance upon some high pretensions. Of him, however, we know little. But Bar Cochab, in the reign of Hadrian, assumed the title of the Son of a Star, in allusion to an ancient prophecy, and pretended to be the Messias. He collected an army, and was crowned by the Jews. Moses Cretensis did the same in the days of Theodosius. Another, named Julian, at a later period, was set over the Jewish armies to destroy the Christians; and after he had obtained some temporary

[1] Matt. xx. 21. [2] Acts i. 6.

success, the people owned him as the Messias.[1] These instances are sufficient to show what sort of Messiah the nation expected, and was ready to receive; and also prove what manner of persons impostors were, and what character they were inclined to appear in.

II. Proceeding from the title assumed by Jesus, to the authority which he exercised, this is found among other sentences—"The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached." This was a bold declaration. He was come to make a material change in their religion. It was saying, in effect,—You have obeyed the ceremonies of the law, and you have honoured the admonitions of the prophets for fifteen hundred years. From henceforth a new authority is to be paramount. I am come to supersede or to confirm them.

Now no feeling could be stronger in any nation, or better founded, than the veneration of the Jews for the Mosaic law. It was impossible that they should not hold this in the devoutest esteem, connected as it was with their very existence as a people. The account of its origin, which had come down to them from their ancestors; its singularity; the effect which that singularity had produced, in establishing a wide separation between themselves and other nations; above all, the important results which they

[1] See Kidder's Demonstration of the Messias.

expected from obeying it, as entitling them to the favour and protection of God; all these circumstances united to render that attachment to their national law, which is common among every people, inconceivably strong in the case of the Jews.

But here, in Jesus, or in the authors of Christianity, whoever they are supposed to be, are Jews who have none of this natural partiality. Professing the fear of God beyond other men; acknowledging him as having sanctioned the law given by Moses; they yet dare to pass judgment on his ancient institutions.[1] Jesus is made to intimate, that the reign of the ceremonial law is over: and he claims the right of introducing new explanations of the moral law. He openly condemns the glosses of this law; erroneous indeed, but generally received: he extends some of its provisions; he elucidates its remote intentions, and even repeals its enactments. The listening multitude were astonished at the authority with which he uttered his edicts:—"Ye have heard that it has been said by them of old time, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, that ye resist not evil."[2] He goes on to condemn existing opinions through many other instances; and sweeps off, by a single sentence, many false inter-

[1] Matt. xix. 8.

[2] The judicial punishment, allowed in certain cases by Exod. xxi. 22, had been perverted by the Scribes as if encouraging private revenge and retaliation.

pretations which long usage had authorized; declaring, "Ye know not what that meaneth; I will have mercy and not sacrifice: the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." The Jews of that day knew not what this meant; they contradicted it in principle and in practice. Born and bred among Jews, how came he to throw off Jewish prejudices? Educated in the midst of prevailing errors, whence did he derive the wisdom which rejected them? Accustomed to the maxim, "Love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy," how came he to say, "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you"? When his countrymen were accustomed to confine the sin of using sacred words "in vain" to cases of gross perjury, how came he to say, "Swear neither by heaven, nor by the earth, nor by Jerusalem; swear not at all"? Accustomed to the law of retaliation, a law sanctioned by national prescription as well as by the natural bent of the human heart, how came he to say, "Resist not evil;" and to teach others to say, "Overcome evil with good"? Accustomed to the ceremonious observance of the Sabbath, how came he to seize that truth, so agreeable to our enlightened reason, but so contradictory to the prevailing notion of his country, "It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day"?

The authority which Jesus exercised over the law, he equally claimed over the interpreters of the law. We learn from various incidental notices, how highly

the Scribes and Pharisees were esteemed among all those over whom religion possessed any hold. They "sat in Moses' seat,"[1] and partook of the reverence paid to the memory of the original lawgiver. The subtle question, "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?" evidently shows, that if he could have obtained their countenance, or even have escaped their hostility, he would have gained no slight accession to his cause. But it is strange, that neither did the habits of his country and of his education impress him with veneration for these teachers, neither did his interest lead him to pretend it. He alone, of all his countrymen, saw through the veil of sanctity which they spread over their corruptions. He alone dared openly to rend it off, and expose their hypocrisy. "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone ... Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity."[2]

[1] Matt. xxiii.

[2] Matt. xxiii. 23, &c. Whoever would see the argument in its just light, must read this whole chapter.

In this manner a way was prepared for the total abrogation of the ritual law, together with the sacrificial worship which it prescribed. This is openly declared by Paul to the Jews: "Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man (Jesus) is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him, all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."[1] Who had taught this "Hebrew of the Hebrews," in contradiction to all that he had learnt and professed from his youth, that anything could be wanting to the completeness or efficiency of the law of Moses? So he argued afterwards in his epistle to the Romans, "What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But *Israel*, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law."[2]

One epistle of this writer is almost wholly occupied in reproving the Galatians for having relapsed into a dependence on that very law, in which he himself had been taught from his youth to trust exclusively. The course of his argument leads him to insist particularly upon the original intent of the law, as tending, in the providence of God, to that

[1] Acts xiii. [2] Rom. ix. 30.

dispensation which had now succeeded it; and about to emerge, as it had now emerged, in that mission of Jesus, by which the prophetic types of the law were fulfilled, and the divine will in instituting them, more clearly displayed. And here he utters sentiments which astonish us not a little, as coming from a Jewish pen. "That no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, is evident. A man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ."[1]

Thus does he annul the practice, and contradict the belief, of fifteen hundred years: the belief of his own country, that country proverbial for zealous attachment to their law; his own belief: for he had been once eager beyond others to maintain the ritual, which he now declares to be set aside. Is it easy to explain this inconsistency?

It appears, too, throughout the history of the early Christian Church, that the national feeling upon this point was one of the strongest obstacles to the reception of the Gospel. The accusation against the apostles was, that they persuaded men to worship God contrary to the law.[2] Even those who acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah obstinately adhered to

[1] Gal. ii. 16; iii. 10, 24.

[2] Acts xviii. 13.

the ceremonies of their ancestors, and desired to impose them on the heathen.[1] Against this feeling a few men, themselves of the same country, having learnt nothing from foreign intercourse, imbued from their infancy with the same prejudices, stand up alone: take upon themselves the character of oracles; reprove the national attachment, and spiritualize the literal law. To say nothing of the success which attended this attempt, how shall we account, on any common principles, for the spirit which excited it?

III. Inquiring further into the agreement of the doctrines of Jesus with the temper of the people to whom they were proposed, we find the following declaration: "I say unto you, That many shall come from the East and West, and shall sit down with the ancestors you so highly venerate, Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. "Think not to say among yourselves, We have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." "I say unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."[2]

[1] Acts xv. 5—31. The deliberations, there recorded, well illustrate the whole of this argument.

[2] See Matt. viii. 11; Luke iii. 8; Matt. xxi. 43.

These sentences contain evident allusions to a popular opinion. And looking into the Jewish character, we find that the event here foretold assails a very distinguishing feature of their belief.

That people believed that their law had been prescribed to them by the Creator of the world, for the express purpose of separating them from other nations. Certainly it had produced that effect. Without entering upon the origin of that law; without going back to the primary causes of that peculiarity which distinguished the Jews from all the rest of the world;—we cannot deny that the peculiarity existed; because the Jews are spoken of by such heathen writers as allude to them at all, as being no less singular and exclusive in their speculative creed than in their national worship.

In consequence of this marked difference from the nations by which they were surrounded; in consequence of their belief of the creation of the world by the true and living God, and their freedom from the polytheism and idolatry which prevailed in all other parts of the world; the Jews, to a man, prided themselves on their peculiar claim to the favour and protection of God: a privilege which their archives gave them reason to believe they had enjoyed for fifteen centuries. Other nations were distinguished by an appellation which implied inferiority, as Gentiles, the common herd of mankind: while they were "children of the covenant;" "a holy nation; a pecu-

liar people."[1] And the internal evidence of all Jewish records proves how closely this conviction was interwoven among all the ideas and customs of the country, both civil and religious.

This, then, is another point, on which Jesus directly opposes the popular prepossession, instead of turning it to his advantage. He introduces a new and most contrary principle. He begins by warning his countrymen no longer to imagine themselves the favourites of Heaven, who were to enjoy a light which shone the brighter from the contrast of surrounding darkness. He was come to "enlighten the Gentiles" also. The religion, which God was now about to establish, was offered to his people Israel first; but not to Israel exclusively: it was designed for all the nations of the earth, that they might become one fold under one Shepherd. How strange, and how unpopular as well as strange, would it sound in Jewish ears, to hear the promise of divine favour, instead of being limited to the posterity of Abraham, universally proposed to the Greek and to the barbarian, to the Jew and to the Gentile. And this new doctrine is not confined to a few detached passages; it pervades the whole ministry of Jesus; and forms the leading object, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly, of many of those parables which so peculiarly distinguish the Christian

[1] Acts iii. 25; Deut. xiv. 2.

writings. Under various figures, he warns his nation of the approach of that time when they should find themselves discarded, deprived of the peculiar glory of their history, and yielding the honour of the service of God to nations which they had hitherto despised for their idolatry.

It was extraordinary enough in Jewish impostors to think of converting other nations, from which they were separated by so broad a line. "The obligation of preaching to the Gentiles the faith of Moses, had never been inculcated as a precept of the law; nor were the Jews inclined to impose it on themselves as a voluntary duty."[1] Such had never been the national practice; but on a sudden the practice of centuries is changed; the prejudice of centuries removed; and the individuals of this exclusive and unsocial people begin to convert other nations, and to disinherit their own countrymen. All national prejudices are strong; they are strongest when founded on religion; and if there is any truth in history, they were stronger among the Jews than among any other people. The authors of Christianity were alone without them.

And yet they were not without them. It appears from the history, that many remarkable circumstances wrought conviction on the mind of Peter, before he was brought to acknowledge, "Of a truth

[1] Gibbon, ch. xv. He passes over the different intention of the Gospel, as if it required no explanation.

I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him."[1] In the subsequent narrative, Peter clearly intimates, that he should not have ventured to admit Gentiles into the religion which he was promulgating, if he had not received indisputable proof of the will of God concerning them. "While Peter yet spake, the Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished (as many as came with Peter), because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?"

If a sceptic refuses his assent to the particulars of this narrative, he cannot deny that the framers of it were aware of the difficulty which their liberal principles would occasion. It is constantly alluded to as forming a subject of dispute between the Jewish and Gentile proselytes; and causing a division among those who could only prevail, we should have supposed, by the most unanimous consent and agreement. "The apostles and brethren that were in Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. And when Peter was come up to Jeru-

[1] Acts x. 34.

salem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them."[1] He explained and defended his conduct. And when they were, at length, convinced by his narrative, the result strikes them as wholly unexpected and surprising, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."

On the part of the majority of the Jews, who opposed the new religion, this admission of the Gentiles was all along an occasion of great hostility. The Jews, as a body, could not bear to be united with strangers in the same synagogue, to hear them instructed out of the same Scriptures, and encouraged by the same promises. This was as unpopular among them, as the abrogation of the Mosaic law. We are told, that "when they saw the multitudes, and that almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming."[2] On another occasion, "the Jews which were of Asia stirred up all the people, crying, Men of Israel, help: this is the man that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place."[3]

[1] Acts xi. 1, &c. [2] Acts xiii. 45. [3] Acts xxi. 28

These disputes and outrages, of which we find many incidental notices throughout the history and writings of the apostles, sufficiently show how strong the current of popular opinion ran; and that the religion of Jesus directly opposed it. Placing ourselves, as we are reasonably bound to do, in the situation of those who first promulgated that religion, must we not be surprised that the countrymen of persons so bigoted should have conceived the idea of proselyting Gentiles, a thing not customary with their nation, but at variance with all their prejudices? Or even allowing that they believed such prejudices to be narrow and groundless:—which, however, had a strong foundation in the national law, a law impressed with the seal of God himself;—would they risk the success of their cause by offending universal opinion; would they avow a principle which was unpopular, even among the friends of the new religion, and which gave an additional and more plausible ground of opposition to its enemies?

IV. But Jesus, I observe further, goes beyond the mere abolition of the law. He foretells the approaching destruction of the temple, nay, the city too. This prophecy makes a prominent figure in his discourses. He only intimates it obscurely, when he says to the Samaritan, "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, ye shall worship the Father."[1] If

[1] John iv. 21.

this stood alone, it might pass for a random insinuation. But elsewhere it is declared, in a manner which cannot be mistaken. "As Jesus went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here! And Jesus answering said unto him: Seest thou these great buildings? There shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be cast down."[1] In another passage it assumes the form of a more solemn warning: "And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side; and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."[2]

Now, if we believe that Jesus said these words, according to the date of his history, and that about forty years after he had spoken them, Jerusalem was destroyed, under circumstances unusually calamitous, and the temple in particular overthrown, in spite of the endeavours of the conqueror himself to preserve

[1] Mark xiii. 1, &c. [2] Luke xix. 41, &c.

it standing; an event which no one ventures to deny: we have arrived at the conclusion of our inquiry, and Jesus confirmed his divine mission by this display of supernatural knowledge.

But I wave, at present, the point of prophecy. I am considering the probability of imposture. And would the framers of a new religion unnecessarily encumber their own cause, a cause which certainly needed no gratuitous impediment, with a prediction as improbable as it was unpopular?

The threatened destruction of Jerusalem struck at the root of all the national prejudices. The Jews confidently relied upon divine protection. The idea of being deserted by that care, and of seeing their city in the hands of foreigners, was not more shocking to their pride, than contradictory to their faith. Such an event was treated by their writers not as a danger, or a disgrace, or a calamity, but as an abomination.[1] And we know, from history, that when the catastrophe really happened, they obstinately shut their eyes to the nearness and extent of the danger; they would not believe that Gentile hands would ever be suffered to pollute the sanctuary which they so highly revered; and expected to the last that a divine interposition would preserve their temple, at least, from the general overthrow.

Now, would men belonging to a country in which

[1] Dan. xi. 31; xii. 11. Matt. xxiv. 15. *το βδέλυγμα.*

the national feeling was so enthusiastically strong, partake in no share of that feeling? Indeed, the feeling is admitted, and avowed: we read, that when the author of this very prophecy beheld the city, he wept over it. The writers, therefore, at all events, were not ignorant of this feeling, whether they shared in it, or no; and being aware of it, would they openly outrage it, with no apparent benefit to their undertaking? For we do not easily perceive how this prediction was to forward their cause. No inference is drawn from it; neither is it advanced in the way of argument: it stands as a naked assertion; from which it might have been expected that either patriotic enthusiasm, or calculating prudence, whichever feeling predominated, would equally have induced them to abstain.

But are we sure that these passages always existed where we now find them? The Christians have for many, very many centuries, had the possession of these title-deeds of their religion; may they not have introduced into them, from time to time, additions of this nature, with the desire of strengthening their cause?[1]

[1] Volney, I suppose, takes this for granted; because he assumes that the national calamities following the destruction of Jerusalem, made the Jews ready to hail the very phantom of a Messiah. I mention this, not because such a writer deserves an answer; but to show what a shadow those are following, who think that the truth of Christianity must be doubtful, because such and such persons have denied it.

We sometimes meet with these insinuations; but they admit of a complete and satisfactory reply. It is favourable to the evidence, though not to the peace of Christianity, that the religion has never attained a state which might render such collusion practicable: it has always had too many enemies, both public and private, to allow of such surreptitious additions to existing documents, without immediate detection. Let us put the question to ourselves, How could this be practised now? Yet it was never more feasible; for, in proportion as the difficulty is increased, as no doubt it is, by the multiplication of copies, the possibility is also increased by the invention of printing, and the facilities of communication.

Such was the unaccountable conduct of the authors of the Christian religion. It will not be denied that they were Jews. We shall not diminish our difficulties, by supposing that a party of Greeks or Syrians entered Judea, and affirmed to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that a teacher named Jesus had wrought great miracles in that city, and had preached new doctrines among them, and that they had put him to a public death. Such a case will hardly be supposed, independently of the exact knowledge of the Jewish history, religion, manners, and sentiments, which is found throughout the Christian Scriptures.

Here, then, were Jews undertaking to invent a religion; and having the field open before them,

they were bound to nothing but the general records, traditions, and opinions of their age and nation. Yet these are the very points which they oppose.

There existed in their country, men of power and authority, who were reverenced as oracles in matters of religion. These they make no attempt to conciliate; but expose, without hesitation, to contempt and reprobation.

Their countrymen expected a temporal prince; and were, at the time, suffering under a foreign yoke, which they bore with great uneasiness and impatience. Yet they persisted in asserting, that the Messiah's kingdom was not of this world.

It was a favourite belief among the Jews, confirmed by the whole course of their history, that their nation enjoyed the exclusive regard and protection of the true God. But the first principle of the Christian religion tended to dislodge the Jews from these high pretensions, and to admit all other nations indiscriminately within the pale of God's church.

These men had been educated in a belief, that a strict compliance with the Mosaic law was prescribed by the command of God, as an indispensable condition of his favour. Yet they set this law aside, both with respect to its supposed efficacy, and its prescriptive obligation.

The city of Jerusalem was universally believed to be secure under the especial care of God, as being

the seat of the only true religion; and its temple was consecrated to his peculiar service, by divine institution, and ancient usage. Yet these men declared, that total destruction was quickly approaching both the temple and the city.

Now we find an equal difficulty meeting us, whether we consider the improbability of men bred up in these prejudices, becoming, by some unknown process of reasoning, superior to them all; or whether we consider the impolicy of fabricating a religion which ran counter to these well-known prepossessions in the minds of those to whom it was proposed. Yet they did that which, to every common apprehension, must appear most impolitic; and they succeeded in that which, according to every known principle, must appear equally improbable.

For it must be remembered, that these were not unfounded or unreasonable prejudices, such as a superior understanding might be expected to sweep away. The hope of a temporal deliverer rested on the interpretation of prophecy, which had represented the Messiah under the character of a conqueror and a king. The reliance on exclusive favour was supported by the express word of God, who had avouched the Jews to be a holy and peculiar people unto him, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and to hearken unto his voice.[1] The attachment to the Mosaic law was founded on its divine

[1] Deut. xxvi. 18, &c.

appointment: the reputed sanctity of the temple on the positive command, that worship should be regularly offered there by all who professed the Jewish faith.

All this renders any attempt to abolish these opinions more bold and extraordinary. I do not desire to assume the actual authority of those sacred records to which the Jews appealed. It is enough for my present purpose, that the Jews had no doubt of that authority; they considered it indisputably divine.

But it is material to remark, though I shall not here dwell upon the argument, that from the moment when we admit the authors of the Christian religion to be what they pretend to be, the instruments of God, all that has been hitherto pointed out as so improbable, is reasonably accounted for, and exactly accords with our natural expectations.

It would be very extraordinary if a divine person, visiting the world under the character assumed by Jesus as the Messiah, should have proposed the present evil world, and not a future and better dispensation, as the final object of his coming. Nothing is more intelligible to us, than that the scribes and pharisees had fallen into the natural error of substituting the form and ceremony for the spirit and reality of religion. Nothing was more to be expected, than that a final revelation of the will of God to mankind, such as the Gospel professes to be, should

be intended and adapted for the whole human race, rather than a single country. And if so, the abrogation of the Jewish law naturally follows: it had performed its purpose with regard to that particular nation, and was little calculated for more general reception. Neither was it extraordinary that a people, which had been always placed under a very peculiar dispensation, should be visited with a punishment so signal as the ruin of their country, when they persisted in rejecting the message of God, and the blessings which he brought within their power.

That, therefore, which is altogether inexplicable, if we consider the Evangelists to have acted on their own authority as the inventors of a new religion, is precisely what we should expect and deem most probable, if they were indeed the instruments and ministers of God.

CHAPTER III.

ORIGINALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES.

It was argued in the preceding chapter, that several of the leading doctrines taught by Jesus and his followers, are such as could not be expected to originate from Jews. This appears on the surface. The Jews desired a Messiah who should be conspicuous and powerful: the Christian Messiah was humble and unknown. The Jewish religion was national and unsocial: the Christian religion is open and universal. The characteristic of the Jewish religion was its ceremonial strictness: the characteristic of the Christian religion is spirituality. The Jews adored their city: Jesus foretold its destruction. So that Christianity cannot be said to have grown up out of Judaism, though it was grafted upon a Jewish stock; its character was entirely new, and as much opposed to the opinions commonly existing among Jews, as to the habits of polytheism.

If we examine the matter further, we shall find much more that is equally surprising. Let me again remind the reader, that unless Christianity was of divine origin, it was a system invented by human

ingenuity. And the authors who invented it, invented it with a view to its being received. If I imagine the case of persons embracing such a design, I must suppose them considering, both what doctrines it were possible for them to propose, and what doctrines were likely to prove acceptable.

The success of Mohammed's imposture may be ascribed in a great degree to the simplicity of what he taught, and its agreement with human reason, as well as with the previous belief of many of his disciples, "There is one God:" a truth which, however it may be obscured by the errors of idolatry, or lost in the darkness of ignorance, yet reason is willing to acquiesce in, and finds confirmed by the general appearance of the world. "Mohammed is his prophet." In declaring this fundamental part of his creed, he was careful to disturb no prejudices, and treated the feelings both of Jews and Christians with tenderness. While he asserted his own superiority, he gave station and authority in his scheme to Adam, to Noah, to Abraham, to Moses, and to Jesus. There is nothing in his Koran which we are surprised to find there: nothing which may not be traced back to existing opinions, or to books within his reach. The truth to which he owed his success, and to which the long duration of his religion must be chiefly attributed; the unity of the Godhead, he found in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures: he had only to pronounce it anew, and to clear away

the intrusive worship of images and martyrs, saints and angels, which had corrupted the church in the dark age and country to which he belonged.

When I subject Christianity to a similar test, no such result appears. I cannot account for its fundamental doctrines. They are agreeable, indeed, to experience and observation: they explain appearances which are and always have been universal throughout the world: they suit the character and meet the necessities of mankind; but they are so far from being on that account "as old as the creation," that a moment's reflection on what the tenets of the Gospel really are, will show them to be in the strictest sense original. Like the theory of attraction, they explain phenomena long observed and everywhere observable; but, like that theory, the explanation was perfectly novel. It is difficult to suppose that unauthorized men, of any rank, education, or country, could ever have undertaken to promulgate such doctrines.

The announcement of purpose attributed to Jesus, was to this effect: "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."—"So God loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that all that believe in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life."[1]

It is implied in these passages, and others which

[1] Matt. xviii. 11; John iii. 16.

confirm them, that mankind are under the wrath and condemnation of God; who had sent his Son, in the form and nature of man, to proclaim the offer of pardon and eternal happiness to as many as became his faithful and obedient disciples.

Now, when we reflect on these propositions, and divest our minds of the familiarity derived from long acquaintance with them, do they appear such as would be likely to occur to any man, or party of men, as the foundation of a religious system, which they were intending to promulgate to the world? Can we believe that imposture, having an unlimited field open before it, would choose this ground to expatiate upon? There is little reason to think that, as Jews, the authors would entertain this view of the state of mankind; still less that, supposing such to be their opinions, they would make this the groundwork of a religion which was to be proposed for acceptance to their countrymen, and to all nations.

These, however, are the doctrines on which the religion of Jesus is built. The basis of the whole, is the alienation of mankind from God, and their consequent state of darkness, error, and condemnation. This is no after-thought, or comment of a later age: it is declared by Jesus himself, in express terms, and in various ways. It is declared by him, when he explains the object of his coming into the world, and applies to himself the prophetic passage

of Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."[1] He affirms it expressly, when he says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me."[2] He implies it, when he affectionately complains of those who rejected his message, "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life."[3] He implies it, when he says, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."[4] He implies it, in ascribing his incarnation to the merciful design of God: who "had not sent his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only-begotten Son of God."[5]

This point, so laid down by the Author of the religion, is mainly insisted on by its teachers after him. It is affirmed by Peter, in his address to his countrymen, when he says, "Repent and be bap-

[1] Luke iv. 18, 19. [2] John xiv. 6. [3] John v. 40.
[4] Ibid. v. 24. [5] Ibid. iii. 17, 18.

tized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins."[1] And again, when he calls upon them to repent and be converted, that their sins may be blotted out:[2] he assures them, "Unto you first, God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."[3] And on another occasion he declares, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."[4]

The same point is very particularly urged by Paul, as the foundation of Christian truth taught by him to those who professed the religion. He systematically argues, from a comprehensive view of the actual state both of Jews and Gentiles, that "every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God. For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."[5] In another epistle he affirms more generally; "the Scripture hath concluded all under sin,

[1] Acts ii. 38. [2] Ibid. iii. 19. [3] Ibid. iii. 26.
[4] Ibid. iv. 12. [5] Rom. iii. 23.

that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe."[1] And throughout his writings, without making such elaborate statements, he so alludes to this as an acknowledged doctrine, as to prove that it was familiarly received and understood to be the basis of the Christian faith. He teaches the Colossians to be thankful to the Father, who had "delivered them from the powers of darkness, and translated them into the kingdom of his dear Son: in whom they had redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."[2] And to the Ephesians he writes, very remarkably, "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."[3]

Such was the doctrine proposed both to Jews and Gentiles. But from what existing opinions, among either, was it derived? The Jews, we know, as a body, were entirely satisfied with themselves.[4] That

[1] Gal. iii. 22. [2] Col. i. 13. [3] Eph. ii. 1.

[4] Trypho the Jew says, in his dialogue with Justin, "Your precepts in the Gospel are so strong and extraordinary, that we conceive it impossible for any to observe them." Orobio says the same.

sect among them which had the most authority and influence, never seems to have doubted but that their scrupulous attention to the ceremonies and prescriptions of their law entitled them to the especial favour of God.[1] Probably the general feelings of their party are accurately characterized by the Pharisee's prayer, in which their self-complacency is described to the life: "Lord, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers: I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess."[2] It is impossible that men who supported those interpretations of the law which Jesus so forcibly confutes; men who eluded the obligations of filial duty by dedicating their money to the uses of the temple, and censured acts

[1] So Orobio, in his conference with Limborch; and in the Answers to Questions proposed to the Jews, published by Brenius; "Spiritualis liberatio solum-modo dependet ab observatione legis quam Deus in Monte Sinai promulgavit." See Owen on Hebrews, i. 81. Turretin alleges it as one of the Jewish notions refuted by Jesus, "that all Jews would certainly be saved." He adduces a passage from the Codex Sanhedrîm, which affirmed that "every Jew had a portion in the future world;" and another, from the Talmud, in which it is said that "Abraham is sitting near the gates of hell, and does not permit any Israelite, however wicked he may be, to descend into hell."—See Horne's Introd. v. iii. p. 73.

"The Jews thought that no Israelite should be deprived of future happiness, whatsoever his faults had been, unless he were guilty of apostasy, idolatry, and a few other crimes, which they specified." Jortin, from Just. Mart. Dial. p. 443. Thirlby.

"The school of Elias used to say, that whosoever learned the traditions of the Misnah might be assured he should have eternal life." —Id. Disc. on Christ. Relig. p. 28.

[2] Luke xviii. 11.

of mercy, because they interfered with the sanctity of the Sabbath—should be awake to those spiritual views of human obligation, and of the extent of the divine law, and of the submission of the heart required by true religion, which would enable them to discover the truth, that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God;"[1] or that those who "have done all," still have reason to call themselves "unprofitable servants."[2]

We may affirm this with more confidence, from the pains which St. Paul takes to establish the point in question on the consciences of the Roman Jews, when they had embraced Christianity. "Behold," he says, "thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge, and of the truth in the law."[3] In this he lays hold of the national prejudice; their self-complacency; their assumed superiority; their confidence of the divine favour. He knew it well; for he describes his own altered state of feelings, which led him to condemn himself, although he had before been, "touching the righteousness which is of the law, blameless."[4] Indeed, nothing from the beginning had excited so much

[1] Rom. iii. 23. [2] Luke xvii. 10. [3] Rom. ii. 17.
[4] Phil. iii. 6. See the whole passage.

malignity against Jesus, as the little respect which he paid to the legal or formal righteousness on which the Pharisees depended, and the boldness with which he laid open the real corruption of their hearts, concealed as it was, even from themselves, by a thick veil of ignorance and error.

The other prevailing party in the nation, the Sadducees, would be in no respect more likely to invent or receive these humiliating doctrines. Denying altogether the immortality of the soul, and the providence of God, not in the total absence of religious instruction, like the heathen, but in spite of a revelation which was generally received by their countrymen; it was not probable, that they should embrace the notion of a Moral Governor in controversy with them, or believe the danger of a resurrection to condemnation. These were the sceptical portion of the people; the free-livers and free-thinkers of their day.

We can tell, from our own experience, what prospect there was of a doctrine proving acceptable to men of this sort, which began by impeaching them as offenders against a righteous and holy God, who looked on all iniquity with abhorrence. The two classes of men whom it is most difficult to bring over to a right acknowledgment of the Christian faith, are those who, like the Romanists at the period of the Reformation, have rigidly, but too exclusively, adhered to the formal ceremonies of

religion; and secondly, those whose consciences have been seared by habitual carelessness or profligate habits, indulged in defiance of the warnings which the Gospel sounds throughout our land, as the law and the prophets sounded them in Jerusalem. The former would not come to Jesus "that they might have life," because they doubted not their having it in themselves; the others "loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

But the conversion of the Jewish nation made a very small part of the object of these teachers. It may be thought, as they purposed to carry this new doctrine among the heathen world, that their task would become easier as they proceeded. Once awakened to a knowledge of their Creator; once acquainted with his holiness, and the purity of his precepts, and his unlimited demand of obedience on the part of man; the heathen could but prostrate themselves in the dust, in humble conviction of the difference between their practice and the law now revealed to them. Certainly, they would do so, when the impression was really made; but how difficult to introduce the light: to create the first conviction! Everything was to be done. When they had been untaught the errors with which their minds were possessed, they had still to learn the unity of God, and his perfect purity; they had to become practically convinced of his moral superintendence; of

the faithful service and obedient love which he requires; and of the resurrection to a future state, in which he will recompense all men according to their conduct in this.[1] Every article in such a creed was new. They had been accustomed to some general belief in superior beings, but those beings little different from themselves, except in the supposed power of doing them good or evil. They had entertained little idea of moral inspection on the part of their deities; little sense of personal responsibility. The immortality of the soul was discussed among their philosophers, but not with any practical view: it was a speculative question, affirmed by some, and denied by others.[2] Nor was there ever any sect among them, perhaps never an individual, upon whom it gained such an ascendancy, as to become a check upon corrupt habits or natural desires.[3] Tra-

[1] Expressions of humility may be found in Antoninus and Seneca; which, taken separately, appear to convey a sense of personal demerit; and have been sometimes quoted for the purpose: but, examined with the context, have no reference to any debt due to a Supreme Judge; but are only introduced, in the way of argument, to recommend clemency in the punishment, or moderation in the censure, of others.—See examples in Seneca de Clem. i. 6. Anton. l. xi. c. 18.

[2] Juvabat de æternitate animarum quærere, imo mehercule *credere*. Credebam enim sane opinionibus magnorum virorum, rem gratissimam *promittentium* magis quam *probantium*.—Sen. Ep. c. 13.

[3] "We are sufficiently acquainted with the eminent persons who flourished in the age of Cicero, and of the first Cæsars, with their actions, their characters, and their motives, to be assured that their conduct in this life was never regulated by any serious conviction of the rewards or punishments of a future life."—Gibbon, i. 558.

"That part of repentance which is a religious sorrow, an acknow-

dition, or probability, had introduced among the Greeks certain vague ideas concerning future punishments for extraordinary crimes; but so mixed up with fiction and fable, that they carried no weight, even among the lowest vulgar. No "dread of something after death" prevented their rushing upon it with eagerness, or meeting it with indifference: in their discourses, and even prayers, at such times, many of which have come down to us, no sense appears of any need of repentance, no pious sorrow, or acknowledgment of offences. One philosopher writes, "Death is the boundary; and the dead appear incapable of good or evil."[1] Was he, or were his disciples, prepared to put the question or admit its force, "What shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Another says, There may be something felt in the act of dying; after death we shall either feel nothing, or enjoy happiness.[2] Would such an one have

ledgment of past offences to God, our Maker and Governor, and prayers to him to forgive them; the Gentiles seemed to have overlooked, both in the course of their life and at the end of it."—Jortin, Disc. p. 265.

[1] Περας γαρ· και οὐδεν ἐν τω τεθνεωτι δοκει οὐτε ἀγαθον οὐτε κακον εἰναι.—Aristot. Ethic. l. iii.

Cæsar, in a well-known passage, makes this argument practical, and urges it as a reason for not inflicting capital punishment on the Catilinarian conspirators, "mortem omnia mortalium mala dissolvere: ultra neque curæ neque gaudio locum esse." An assertion which his rival and opponent scarcely ventures to censure.—Sall. Bell. Cat. 50.

[2] Cicero de Senectute.

received the warning: "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell"? The same man, and he was one of the wisest of the ancients, he says it too, writing as a moralist, "Keep faithfully to what you have promised seriously as in the sight of God; for this is necessary, not on account of the divine anger, which has no reality, but for the sake of justice and good faith."[1] How unlike the language which speaks of a "day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds: to those who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil."[2]

Even with regard to the Jews themselves, the views concerning a future state which existed among them, were of a fluctuating, indefinite nature, the glimmering rather than the clear light of truth, altogether unlike what we meet with in the discourses of Jesus and his followers. Though the

[1] Num iratum timemus Jovem? Hoc quidem commune est omnium philosophorum, nunquam nec irasci Deum, nec nocere.—Cic. de Off. iii. 28.

[2] Romans ii. 5- 9.

immortality of the soul was the prevailing sentiment of the synagogue, it has been observed already that this did not prevent the existence of a sect among them, in considerable celebrity, and strictly attached to the Mosaic law, who yet denied any resurrection.

In the Old Testament, the state of the deceased is spoken of very briefly and obscurely. It is represented to us rather by negative than by positive qualities; by its silence, its darkness; by the ignorance of the living about it.[1] So that the Jews, at least about the time when Christianity was first introduced, were in the habit of treating the subject of a future state as a matter of philosophy, rather than of religion. For their opinions on this head had undergone some variations, as well as those of the heathen. The immortality of the soul had been much more generally believed among the earlier Greeks, than in later times, and among the Romans. And from the subjection of the Jews, first to the Macedonian empire, and afterwards to the Romans, they imbibed many of the sentiments of the people with whom they had intercourse, particularly on those subjects where the law was not explicit. Several speculative tenets from the philosophy of other eastern nations also gained admission among them."[2]

[1] See Campbell on the Gospels. Preliminary Dissertation.

[2] This is evident from the account given by Josephus of the sentiments of the Pharisees. Antiq. 18. 2. Bell. Jud. ii. 12. Their

Hence it arose, that with regard to a future state, a great difference is observable between the language of the ancient prophets, and the popular opinions of the Jews at the Christian era. It may seem surprising now to us, when we read their Scriptures with eyes enlightened by subsequent discoveries, that there should have been amongst the many dissentients from the doctrine of the future existence and responsibility of mankind. But their example shows us the difference between prophetic hints or allusions to a truth, and positive declarations: between analogical conclusions, and the explicit assertions of a law, of which future rewards and punishments are the sanction.

The Jew, then, speaking of the nation generally, was in no state, from his previous habits of thinking, to invent or receive a religion like the Christian. His views of futurity had nothing clear or positive about them. His usual train of thought seldom carried him beyond this world; and when it did, he was under no apprehension; therefore he was not prepared, without further conviction, to believe anything, or to resign anything, in dependence upon an uncertain future. He was no more ready to embrace,

prevalent opinion was, that the soul survived the body: that vicious souls would suffer imprisonment in Hades: that the souls of the virtuous would be happy there, and in time be privileged to transmigrate into other bodies: which was their *ἀναστασις των νεκρων*.— Campbell, *ubi supra*. See also Horne's Introd. vol. ii. p. 618.

than he was likely to conceive the precept, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth." It would be new to him to hear the positive assurance, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal."

II. If there was no acknowledgment of sinfulness, if there was no feeling of consequent danger, no "fearful expectation of judgment:"—there could be, of course, no preparation for the great and leading article of the Gospel, the doctrine of redemption. That in pity for the condition of mankind, God had sent his Son into the world to make an atonement for their sins, and to ransom from eternal condemnation as many as should believe in his name, and receive him as their Saviour: this was a declaration, which nothing in the previous opinion or expectations of either Jews or heathen tended to make credible or popular.

The heathen, indeed, had been accustomed to propitiate their deities by sacrifice; and such offerings made an important part of their national worship. We find, too, from history, that among nations as widely separated from each other as the Druids in Gaul, and the Persians and Indians in the East, the remarkable custom of offering human sacrifices prevailed. And although we are not acquainted, from any clear authority, with the notions upon which this custom was originally founded, we cannot easily

account for its existence, except from a dread of Divine anger, and a vague hope of averting this from the head of one victim to that of another.[1] The explanation is most probable, if I do not assume too much in saying so, which represents it as a fragment of early revelation, broken off from the system of which it formed a part, and carried down along the stream of time after its object and purpose had been forgotten. For, whatever may have been the origin of the practice, we know enough of the heathen sacrifices, and the prayers which accompanied them, to be assured that this mode of worship was rather a compliance with ancient custom, than a solemn offering of which any reasonable account could be given. It did not convey, generally, any idea of substitution, or arise from any sense of personal danger. It had been the practice of their ancestors, the practice of the country; and as such it was maintained. And the idea which attended it was rather that of expensive purchase than of vicarious suffering.[2] When Jesus declared that he came "to give his life a ransom for many;" and when

[1] The position maintained by Dr. Priestley, that "in no nation, ancient or modern, Jew or heathen, has any idea of a doctrine of atonement, or of any requisite for forgiveness, save repentance and reformation, ever existed," is so inconsistent with fact, that it is surprising he should have ventured the assertion. Magee, i. 292. Yet the ideas which did exist on that subject were far too vague and indefinite to become a foundation for the doctrines of the Gospel.

[2] *Δωρα θεους πειθει, και αἰδοιους βασιληας.* Placatur donis Jupiter ipse datis.

Peter affirms, "that Christ bore our sins in his own body on the tree; that he once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God,"[1] we are presented with a clear and definite idea; nothing like which was conveyed by the heathen sacrifices, or the petitions offered together with them, which expressed the anxiety of the worshippers for some temporal good, and, at the same time, betrayed their ignorance and indifference concerning a future state.

Among the Jews, vicarious sacrifices formed a very remarkable part of their worship; and, by the law which enacted them, were declared to convey an acknowledgment of demerit, and to be intended as a propitiation for sin, in language too clear to be mistaken. But the Jews did not look to anything beyond the actual sacrifice ordained by their law. They considered it as being perfect and sufficient in itself, and did not expect any ulterior fulfilment, much less such a fulfilment as the Gospel declared. They had never been accustomed to interpret their Scriptures in this way. It was there predicted in a prophecy, confessedly relating to the Messiah, that he should "be cut off, but not for himself."[2] But they had never applied this and other passages of similar import to the actual circumstances of the expected Messiah; neither could they be persuaded

[1] Matt. xx. 28. 1 Pet. ii. 24; iii. 18. [2] Dan. ix. 26.

to apply them so, against the stream of a contrary prepossession. So far from this being their previous idea or expectation, Jesus is represented as employing frequent pains, and for a long time without effect, even to convince his immediate followers that such was the purport of their ancient prophecies.[1]

Under these discouragements, with no party on his side, and no feeling in his favour, Jesus is represented as proclaiming to his disciples and countrymen, that he had come into the world as a peacemaker between God and men, by offering himself a sacrifice in their stead. Declaring "that God so loved the world, that he had sent his only Son, to the end that all that believe in him might not perish, but have eternal life." Declaring that "the Son of man was come, to give his life a ransom for many:"—declaring that "as Moses lifted up the serpent in

[1] A remarkable passage occurs in Philo, concerning the Λογος, not indeed as *Redeemer*, but as *Mediator*. Τω ἀρχαγγελῳ και πρεσβυτατῳ Λογῳ δωρεαν ἐξαιρετον ἐδωκεν ὁ τα ὁλα γεννησας πατηρ, ἱνα μεθοριος στας το γενομενον διακρινη του πεποιηκοτος, with more to the same purpose. (V. i. p. 501. edit. Mangey.) On this and other coincidences between the Christian writers and Philo, Bryant observes: "If we admit these doctrines of Philo, and excuse his prejudices and misapplication, we shall find some wonderful truths afforded. And these could not be borrowed from his brethren the Jews; for whatever knowledge they had of these mysteries, it was by no means adequate to the intelligence which he has given." His Discourse on Repentance, however, as well as the general tenour of his works, shows, that whether he derived his expressions from Christian sources, as Bryant supposes, or not, his knowledge was merely theoretical; he had no practical understanding of the doctrine of mediation.

the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up," that they might look on him, and be saved. Which assertion was more fully explained by the apostles, after the event of his crucifixion; when they affirmed in plain terms, that he "was delivered for our offences;" that "whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us;" that "when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son;" that "we have redemption through his blood;" that "he was once offered, to bear the sins of many;" that "God sent his Son to make propitiation for our sins."

Now, whatever may be thought of this declaration, one thing, at least, can never be pretended; that it was conformable to any opinions existing among the Jews of that age. Otherwise, why did they revolt from his claims? Yet we are told, that when he had been explaining, more particularly than before, the entire reliance and dependence upon him which the regeneration and salvation of their souls required: many said, "This is a hard saying; who can bear it? And from that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."[1] On another occasion, "Jesus said to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered him, We

[1] John vi. 60. 66.

be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man; how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."[1] This assertion was very ill received by the generality; and that it would be so, he was well aware, and often spoke to this purport: "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me."[2]

On another occasion, Jesus is made to assert, "If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. My sheep hear my voice; and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life, and none shall pluck them out of my hand."[3] Now, is this a pretension which Jesus was likely to assume, from a desire of gaining reputation, or converting proselytes? We have seen that there was nothing in the state of the public mind, either among Jews or heathens, which could have led to his taking upon himself the character of Mediator between the world and God. He had not the advantage of coming to the world, as one who preached his religion in these latter times came to an Hindoo suffering under the torment of some self-inflicted penance, and pointed out the uselessness of such voluntary martyrdom, since God had "laid on one the iniquity of us all;" and "the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin." He found none ready to exclaim, "This is what I

[1] John viii. 31. [2] Matt. xi. 6. [3] John viii. 51; x. 27.

want," as the Hindoo replied, and threw away the instruments of his torture. Before men could be persuaded to trust in him as their Mediator, they must be first convinced of a future state; then, of a future judgment; and then, of their incompetency to meet that judgment; their liability to the divine wrath. We know this, from what we know of their previous sentiments; we perceive it from the general strain of his declarations; which aim at proving the value of the soul; its imminent risk; the certainty and strictness of the divine tribunal; the misery of punishment; the blessedness of Heaven. We collect the same from the few addresses of the apostles to the heathen which are recorded. Before the court of Areopagus, Paul makes it his first object to prove the existence of the Creator, and the resurrection of the dead.[1] And to the Roman governor, Felix, he began by "reasoning of temperance, and righteousness, and judgment to come."[2] Till he had laid this foundation, there was nothing for the Gospel to stand upon.

There would be no justice, therefore, in comparing the impression made by the doctrines of the Christian teachers with that of any modern impostor or enthusiast, who easily persuades the ignorant to receive his pretensions. He takes advantage of the belief already existing, and supported on other

[1] Acts xvii. 24, &c. [2] Ibid. xxiv. 25.

grounds, and on that he founds and establishes his claim to attention. All that he needs to prove is this, that he is an interpreter of the Bible, which his hearers, on widely different evidence, already believe to be the word of God. Jesus, on the contrary, came, not to interpret a revelation, but to make one; to make one in open contradiction to the natural opinions and popular belief of all who heard it.

And the little probability which existed of such a revelation as this being believed, or invented in order to its being believed, is sufficiently plain from what we ourselves know, and feel, and have constant opportunity of observing. The doctrines in question, that Jesus came to make atonement for the sins of men; for that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" and that "eternal life is the gift of God through him," or for his sake: how are these statements usually received? Are they the first or the last doctrines which mankind are willing to acquiesce in? Are there not multitudes who do not dispute or doubt the evidence which confirms the authority of the Scriptures, and yet refuse their assent to this leading tenet? Is it not generally understood to be so contrary to the prepossessions of mankind, that it is often kept out of sight, and has been seldom insisted on as the main object of the Gospel, in treatises which were intended to give a popular view of the evidences of Christi-

anity? Notwithstanding the clearness with which it is laid down, and the various proofs which can be alleged to show that divine revelation, from the beginning, has hinged upon this as its principal point; we know that a considerable body, even among those who do not neglect religion, labour to exclude this article from the Gospel, on the express plea that it is contrary to the suggestions of our reason, and, therefore, cannot be admitted by those who profess themselves "rational Christians."

The proposition which they maintain is, that "God freely forgives the sins of men, upon repentance; and that there can be no occasion, properly speaking, for anything further being done, to avert the punishment with which they have been threatened."[1] On this ground, the sacrifice which Jesus declared that he came to make, and which his apostles affirmed that he had made upon the cross, is explained away. His death is sometimes said to have confirmed the truth of his mission. Others treat it as an "illustrious example, showing us the most perfect obedience to God, and the most generous goodness and love to man, recommended to our imitation by all possible endearments and engaging considerations." And they object against the doctrine of atonement, "as having greatly debased the truth of the natural placability of the

[1] Priestley, Hist. of the Corruptions of Christianity. Jowett on the Epistles, p. 469, &c. &c.

Divine Being, and our ideas of the equity of his government."[1] So they consider Jesus as a man commissioned by God to make a fuller communication of his will, and teach a purer morality than the world had known before; by his life, to set an example of perfect obedience; by his death, to manifest his sincerity; and by his resurrection, to convince us of the great truth which he had been commissioned to teach, our rising again to future life.[2]

If those who do not discard the authority of Scripture, nay, who profess to revere it, can be thus induced to bend and distort its plain declarations, in order to bring them to the level of their previous opinions: we have a striking argument to prove what I began this chapter by alleging, namely, that the purpose which Jesus assigns for his appearance in the world was very little likely to have been fabricated in order to deceive; and if invented, either by fraud or enthusiasm, very little likely to have obtained attention and credit, without overpowering evidence.

III. The peculiar death of Christ opposed an additional barrier to the reception of his religion. "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have

[1] Taylor's Key to Apostol. Writings. For the whole subject, see Archbishop Magee on the Atonement, *passim*.

[2] Magee, i. 12.

crucified, both Lord and Christ."[1] So Peter affirmed, in a full assembly of his countrymen. But was it probable, that he should be believed in this, on his bare and unsupported assertion? Neither would the apostles, we must imagine, be listened to abroad, when they came to declare among foreign nations, that he who was now held up as the Saviour of the world, and who was to become the object of universal faith and trust, was a Jew, who had been crucified at the instigation of his countrymen. Such a death was certainly an essential part of the whole system; but it was long before that system could be explained, and longer still before it could be understood and comprehended by Gentile hearers, to whom everything relating to the Jewish law, its rites, and typical sacrifices, was new. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world."[2] Such a sentence fills the Christian with love and admiration; and even to the sceptic of the present day, the idea which it conveys is familiar; and from the effect of early association, and popular reverence, carries with it so much that is venerable, that we are unable to judge how strange, not to say revolting, the doctrine must have appeared to the minds of a Grecian or Roman audience.

The plan of redemption disclosed in the Gospel, comes to us united with the Jewish Scriptures and

[1] Acts ii. 36. [2] John i. 29.

Jewish history; many circumstances of which concur to introduce it gradually to our minds. But, to a Jew, the Cross was an object of peculiar abhorrence. They had a proverbial sentence in their law, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Their firm belief that the Messiah should be a prince and a conqueror, sufficiently disinclined them to receive any one in that character, who had no outward splendour that men should admire. But a disgraceful end was a still more decided disqualification. And they seemed to themselves to have given a death-blow to his pretensions, when they had succeeded in contriving for him a punishment so mean and degrading. "Come down from the cross, if thou be the Son of God."—"He saved others, himself he cannot save."

Among the other nations to which Christianity was first proposed, this obstacle would be no less invincible. That one who had been condemned by his own countrymen to death; that one who had actually suffered that death by an execution reserved for the vilest malefactors; which it was not permitted to inflict on the most notorious offender, if a Roman citizen; that he should be now proclaimed as one sent from God to call the world to repentance, and through whom alone was an opening of acceptance with God: all this would appear so contradictory to the natural feelings and habitual associations of the persons to whom it was addressed, that it could not

be received on any common authority. It seems impossible that men should venture to propose it, without some strong confirmation to which they might appeal. The difficulty is acknowledged in the history itself. The whole matter is there represented as quite inexplicable, even to the Apostles, till the entire system of the Gospel was laid open to them; and they were enabled to perceive, that the expected Messiah "ought to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory." [1] During their Master's lifetime, all intimations from him of what he was about to undergo were met with an indignant or incredulous repulse. "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not happen to thee."—"And if to men so prepossessed as were the Jews, this doctrine could not fail to appear impious and execrable; to men so prepossessed as were the Gentiles, it could not fail to appear absurd. In fact, it is manifest from the writings of the apologists for Christianity, in the second and third centuries, that this doctrine long continued to be a principal matter of offence to the enemies of Christianity, and was regarded by such as an insurmountable objection. They treated it as no better than madness, to place confidence in a man whom God had abandoned to the scourge of the executioner, and the indelible reproach of the cross." [2]

[1] Luke xxiv. 26.

[2] Campbell, Serm. ii. v. 2, p. 23. *Λογον ἐπαγγελλομενον υἱον εἰναι*

Now, if the followers of Jesus had been conscious that they were promulgating an unsupported fable, they would surely have kept out of sight this part of their leader's history. Or, if it were too notorious to be omitted in the narrative, we should find them always on the watch to cover the disgrace, and remove the impression which it was naturally calculated to raise. Yet this precaution was neglected, or very imperfectly used by any of the Evangelists. They record the crucifixion as faithfully as they record many other things which might be likely to create a prejudice against the religion: but the explication is left for the more complete development of the doctrine which was to follow. Neither did the Apostles, in their subsequent ministry, ever conceal this revolting fact, or cloak the disgrace of their Lord under the general dignity of the divine teacher, whose zeal had made him a sacrifice to popular fury. St. Paul is constantly repeating, "I preach Christ, and him crucified"—"I glory in the cross of Christ:" though he was well aware, at the same time, that this very reproach of the cross made his religion "a stumbling-block to the Jews, and foolishness to the

του θεου, ἀποδεικνυμεν οὐ Λογον καθαρον και ἁγιον, ἀλλα ἀνθρωπον ἀτιμοτατον, ἀπαχθεντα και ἀποτυμπανισθεντα. Cels. ap. Orig. p. 79. Ed. Spencer.

Νεκρου τινος φημην εἰς τον ὑμετερον (sc. Deorum) ἐγκατεστησε κληρον. Libanius, de Constantino loquens. Paneg. Julian. 250.

Ἔπειτα ὁ νομοθετης ὁ πρωτος ἐπεισεν αὐτους, ὡς ἀδελφοι παντες εἰεν ἀλληλων, ἐπειδαν ἁπαξ παραβαντες Θεους μεν τους Ἑλληνικους ἀπαρνησωνται, τον δε ἀνασκολοπισμενον ἐκεινον Σοφιστην αὐτων προσκυνωσι. Lucian de Morte Peregrini.

Greeks." He acknowledges the "offence" taken at the cross; and speaks of "enemies of the cross of Christ:" confessing, that in the doctrines which he proclaimed there was much to contradict the notions of human wisdom, and which human wisdom would reluctantly receive.[1]

All this has very little the appearance of fabrication. No one has ever shown what could induce men to impose a religion on the world, when, by doing so, they risked everything and could gain nothing. If they were led by interest, where was their profit? If they were hurried along by enthusiasm, whence came their sobriety? But if this argument is set aside; if it is thought that the anomalies of human nature make it impossible always to determine, from any ordinary rules of conduct, what enterprise men may or may not take in hand: then I look to another test, to the religion itself, instead of the persons who introduced it. And I argue, that the main doctrines of Christianity—the condemnation of mankind as corrupt in the sight of God, and the atonement made upon the cross by Jesus as a Mediator between the offenders and their Judge,—are doctrines which we cannot, on any rational or probable grounds, attribute to imposture. Taking them as maintained by the Apostles, with all their attending circumstances of the resurrection of the dead, the future judgment, the final punishment

[1] 1 Cor. i. from v. 17 to the end of the chapter.

of the wicked, and the eternal happiness of the redeemed, we cannot trace their origin to any known or accessible source in the belief of those times and countries. Neither can we account for their reception. There was nothing in the doctrines themselves to allure or conciliate; and the minds, both of Jews and Gentiles, were altogether unprepared and unlikely to embrace a religion which had nothing in common with their former opinions, and directly opposed some of their strongest prejudices.

CHAPTER IV.

CONNEXION OF CHRISTIANITY WITH THE JEWISH HISTORY AND SCRIPTURES.

THE inquiry of the preceding chapter came to this result: that the Christian religion sets out upon a view of the state of mankind which was original, and proclaims a method of recovery from that state, which was also original: the expectation of such an event, to be so accomplished, having never entered into the minds of Jews or Gentiles.

But is it not a possible case, that the followers of Jesus, being disappointed by his death, and required to account for it, or to give up their purpose, and confess themselves deluded; should have struck out the idea of atonement, and affirmed that he died a sacrifice? Then having hit upon this explanation, they supported it as they could out of the institutions of their law, and the facts related in their history.

I am the more bound to consider this hypothesis, because it has been recently brought forward by one of our most ingenious rationalists, as sufficiently

accounting for the language of St. Paul and the other Apostles, when they represent the death of Christ as the propitiation for our sins. Mr. Jowett writes: "It must be remembered that the Apostles were Jews; they were so before their conversion; they remained so afterwards in their thoughts and language. They could not lay aside their first nature, or divest themselves at once of Jewish modes of expression. Sacrifice and atonement were leading ideas of the Jewish dispensation: 'without shedding of blood there was no remission.' In thinking of the death of Christ and of the fulfilment of which He spoke, it was natural for them to think of Him as a sacrifice, and atonement for sin. To Him bore all the prophets witness, as well as the types of the law and the history of the Jewish people. All their life long they had been sacrificing, and 'living in the commandments of the law blameless.' What a striking view must it have been in their minds, that their rites and ceremonies were not in vain, but only done in ignorance of their true design and import; that there was more in them than the Chief Priests or Pharisees could conceive. There was meaning in the sacrifices which they could not comprehend, as they truly felt that there was in the death of Christ more than they could understand, and they interpreted the one by the other. And whenever the thought was suggested to men's minds, at every opening of the Old Testament a new light fell

upon every page: the history of Abraham, the settlement in the promised land, the least details in the Temple and the Tabernacle, were written for their instruction."[1]

This hypothesis, as will be at once perceived, proceeds upon the assumption which it is the object of the present treatise to refute; namely, that the Apostles had no divine commission, but acted on purposes of their own. If they were really what they professed to be, "servants of the most high God, showing the way of salvation," they could not have made a false idea, an unauthorized representation, the main basis of their religion. If Jesus had been merely the victim of the enmity of his countrymen, indignant because he "made himself the Son of God," they could not, except by a deliberate project of imposture, have maintained that he gave his life a ransom for man's sin. So that if this view is to be received, the whole fabric of Christian faith falls to the ground. It is the invention of the Apostles, and not the revelation of God.

Now it is not to be denied, but on the contrary is a most important fact, that there are points in the law, and circumstances in the history, of the Jews, to which the death of Jesus appears to bear a more or less direct relation.

1. In a very early part of their history, the father of the nation, Abraham, is represented as receiving

[1] Jowett on Epistles, Vol. ii. p. 475.

a command from God, to offer his only son, Isaac, as a victim to be sacrificed on the altar by his own hand. Abraham obeyed the extraordinary command; and to the full extent of purpose and intention the sacrifice was consummated; being only restrained at the very crisis of accomplishment, by divine interposition.[1] Do we see here the germ of the doctrine that "God so loved the world, as to send his only begotten Son" to make "a propitiation for their sins?"

2. Again, in the journey through the wilderness, we find it related that when the camp of the Israelites was infested with venomous serpents, sent as a judicial chastisement for their disobedience, Moses erected, by divine command, a serpent of brass: numbers of the people had perished; but as many as looked up to this brazen figure, were healed of their wounds. To this the crucifixion of Jesus is explicitly compared: "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up."[2]

3. The departure of the Israelites from Egypt was attended with this remarkable circumstance. That they might avoid the fate with which the Egyptians were threatened, the Israelites were ordered, in every family, to kill a lamb, and sprinkle the doors

[1] Gen. xxii.; being the chapter selected for the Church Service on Good Friday.

[2] Numbers xxi. 8. John iii. 14.

of their houses with its blood, under a promise that the impending calamity should be averted from every house on which this token was displayed. The anniversary of this great event in their history, their departure from Egypt, was to be carefully celebrated, and commemorated in every family by the annual sacrifice of a lamb slain in a manner particularly prescribed. This greatest of the Jewish festivals was termed the Passover, from the peculiar circumstances of its institution.[1]

This custom is alluded to, when Jesus is designated as "the Lamb of God;" and he is specifically styled "our Passover, who is sacrificed for us."[2]

4. The establishment of the law of Moses, which followed the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, is represented as a covenant; in which a rich and fruitful country is promised to that people, together with an abundant store of temporal blessings, if they continued obedient to the prescriptions of the law. The Gospel is also represented as a covenant, of which Jesus is the Mediator;[3] "a new and better covenant," sanctioned not by transitory or earthly rewards, but by the promise of eternal life to as many as embrace that covenant through faith in its author.

5. By the Mosaic law a high priest was appointed,

[1] Exod. xii. 27, &c.
[2] John i. 29. Revelation, *passim*. 1 Cor. v. 7.
[3] Heb. xii. 24; ix. 15.

who should "offer gifts and sacrifices" in the name of the people. The teachers of the Gospel stated, that by this appointment the purpose of the incarnation of Jesus was prefigured: who was to appear as the great, and acceptable, and final Intercessor for mankind, and who, "by the sacrifice of himself," "the offering of his body once for all," should "put away sin."[1]

6. It was part of the ceremonial of the Jewish law, that the altar, and the vessels used in sacrifice, should be washed, and the people sprinkled, with the blood of the victim.[2] On one occasion, the ratification of the covenant between God and that people was solemnized in this way. And the reason of the original appointment is expressed in these words—"the blood is the atonement for the soul."[3]

This custom is declared in the New Testament to have been a type of the purpose of God, to sanctify for himself a people through the blood of Christ; which is said to have ratified an "everlasting covenant;" to be sprinkled upon the conscience; to be the "price of redemption and forgiveness of sins," the object of faith, and the medium of justification.[4]

Now the question is, whether the authors of Christianity took advantage of these and other circumstances belonging to their history and law, and

[1] Heb. ix. 26; x. 10. [2] Exod. xxiv. 6, &c. [3] Levit. xvii. 11.
[4] Heb. xiii. 20; x. 22. Eph. i. 7. Rom. iii. 25; v. 9.

adapted them to their purpose, in order to make out a plausible explanation of their leader's death.

It was before mentioned, that no expectation of any such fulfilment of the law existed among the Jews. They observed the type, without looking towards the antitype. They considered their law to be perfect in itself; and it does not appear that they generally interpreted it in a figurative point of view. Jesus was not understood, when he made allusion to the historical types and applied them to himself.[1] And the Apostle, who explains, in an elaborate treatise, the prophetical institutions of the law, and their fulfilment in what Jesus had done and suffered, thinks it necessary to prove the agreement point by point, as if he was laying before his countrymen a novel and unexpected interpretation.[2]

[1] See Appendix, No. 1.

[2] I have ventured to express myself thus positively concerning the types, in the absence of all evidence to the contrary. Whatever we know of the Jews of that era must either be derived from the Christian Scriptures, or from Josephus and Philo. None of these give us ground to conceive that the Jews were expecting a typical fulfilment of their law, as they were expecting the accomplishment of their prophecies. They give us every reason for presuming the contrary. The notion which Philo and Josephus indulged, was to consider the tabernacle as typical of the universe, and its various parts. Josephus defends the tabernacle, the dress of the high priest, and the sacred vessels, in these words: *ἕκαστα τουτων εἰς ἀπομιμησιν καὶ διατυπωσιν* **ΤΩΝ ΟΛΩΝ,** *εἴτις ἀφθονως ἐθελοι καὶ μετα συνεσεως σκοπειν, εὑρησει γεγονατα.* He then explains his meaning by comparing the three divisions of the tabernacle to the sea, the earth, and the heavens; the shew-bread to the twelve months, the candlesticks to the seven planets, &c. Antiq. Jud. l. iii. c. vii. § 7. Philo's words are, *Σκηνην*

We have, therefore, little reason to suppose that these men, in opposition to the current of public opinion, would recover from the dismay into which their leader's death had thrown them, to exhibit him in the new character of a sacrifice: would affirm, contrary to every received idea, that it was the object of the predicted Messiah's appearance to make that sacrifice: would have the ingenuity to support their fiction by appealing to the ceremonies of the national worship; and would ultimately succeed in converting a number of their countrymen to their side.

But, waiving this improbability, how are we to account for the existence, in the Jewish law, of those typical institutions which allowed of such an application? How are we to account for the historical facts which illustrate the Gospel, and receive illustration from it? In proportion as these are suitable to the purpose for which the Apostles employed

οὐν, ἐργον ἱερωτατον, δημιουργειν ἐδοξεν, ὃς την κατασκευην θεσφατοις λογιοις ἀπο του ὀρους Μωυσης ἀνεδιδασκετο, των μελλοντων ἀποτελεισθαι σωματων ἀσωματους ἰδεας τῃ ψυχῃ θεωρων, προς ἃς ἐδει, καθαπερ ἀπ' ἀρχετυπου γραφης καὶ νοητων παραδειγματων αἰσθητα μιμηματα ἀπεικονισθηναι. De Mose. 1. iii. p. 665 (vol. ii. p. 146, ed. Mangey). What hint do we find here of a typical sacrifice, or of any typical fulfilment hereafter to be brought out?

At the same time, since it appears probable from John viii. 56, that a special revelation was granted to Abraham, so I am far from denying that there may have been some in every period of the Jewish history, to whom the Holy Spirit vouchsafed a clearer insight into the nature of sacrifices, and especially of the one great sacrifice, than was generally enjoyed. The argument is no way affected by this concession. These persons would not be authors of imposture.

them, the wonder is increased that they should be found in the history at all.

1. That God should send his Son into the world, to suffer a judicial death for the sins of mankind, is an idea so astonishing, that we receive it with difficulty and hesitation. It is extraordinary, too, that the Jewish history should relate how the greatest patriarch of their nation was commanded to make a similar sacrifice, by the offer of his only son upon the altar to God. The resemblance, in a matter so remarkable, seems to indicate connexion; especially when we consider the minute circumstances to which that resemblance extends. Each individual concerned was an only and a beloved son of his father. Each was doomed by his father to be made a sacrifice. Each bore upon his own shoulders the wood upon which he was to suffer. Each willingly gave up the life he was requested to resign; and, "as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened he not his mouth." Each was accounted dead in the sight of men, yet each was raised again, and returned unto those he had left. Each was the heir of promise by descent, and to each has the promise been fulfilled. The seed of each has been multiplied "as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore; and in their seed have all the nations of the earth been blessed."[1]

[1] Benson's Lectures, vol. ii. Lect. xiv.

2. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." This was the Christian doctrine; but it was unlike anything which the world had heard or conceived before. So it was a singular fact, which occurs in the Jewish annals, that the people, when wounded and dying by the bite of poisonous serpents, should be told to lift up their eyes towards the image elevated above them, and so receive a cure. The remedy, to which the party requiring aid contributed nothing, and to which the prescribed means appeared wholly inadequate, is in both cases annexed to the act of faith. Can we suppose such coincidence to have been casual?

3. The Jews were in possession of a law peculiar to themselves, which differs in its nature and provisions from that of every other country, and receives its easiest explanation, when considered as an apparatus for introducing the religion of Jesus. The sacrifices ordained by Moses were not treated, as in the worship prevalent elsewhere, in the light of compensations; but clearly conveyed the idea of substitution. The offender was instructed to bring his offering, a male without blemish, and to lay his hand upon its head, and to kill it as a sin-offering; and the priest should "make atonement for the sin that he had committed, and it should be forgiven him."[1] Another appointment ordered, that the priest should

[1] Levit. iv. 24, 53.

lay both his hands upon the head of the victim, and "confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon his head."[1]

This agrees both with what was prophetically said concerning the death of Jesus, and with what was subsequently declared to be its effect. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed...The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all...For the transgression of my people was he stricken." So wrote the prophet. And so the apostle: "Christ suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." "He himself bore our sins in his own body." "We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."[2]

With respect to the paschal lamb, the law directed that on the tenth day of the month Abib, in which they left Egypt, every family should select a lamb, a male of the first year, without spot or blemish, and keep it up unto the fourteenth day, when the whole congregation should kill it in the evening. It was to be slain and eaten in a particular manner, so that no bone should be broken; and no part was to be suffered to remain unto the morning.[3]

[1] Levit. xvi. 21. [2] Isaiah liii.; 1 Pet. iii. 18; Heb. x. 10.
[3] Exod. xii.

Now the existence of an institution so singular is a remarkable fact: and its agreement with transactions which happened so long after its appointment, is still more remarkable; a resemblance which the agents in those transactions did not intend or perceive; and depending upon circumstances which those who were interested in the resemblance could in no way command.

Jesus, on the tenth day of the same month Abib, came up to Jerusalem, four days before the passover. His judge was led to declare that he could "find no fault in him;" and thus affirmed him to be without blemish. It was contrary to all previous probability, that he should be executed under the Roman jurisdiction. Pilate even strove to prevail with the Jews to deal with him after their own law. Had he succeeded, or had he refused to gratify their wishes, the death of Jesus would not have been by crucifixion. And had he not died by crucifixion, the resemblance would not have been made good, which required that the blood should be poured out; that "a bone of him should not be broken." Neither could there have been room for the application of the prophecy, "They shall look upon him whom they pierced." Neither was it within the reach of anticipation that the crucifixion should take place on that particular evening, which was the anniversary of the first sacrifice of the passover, at a distance of fifteen hundred and twenty-

four years; or that as it was ordered that no part of the victim lamb should remain until the following morning, so the body of Jesus was buried, notwithstanding the circumstances of his death, without delay; or that he should be condemned by the whole assembly of the people.

We have it in our choice, either to believe that all this concurrence of circumstances was purely accidental, or to suppose that the Jewish history and the Mosaic law were connected from the beginning with the death of Jesus, which had been determined in the counsels of God. Had this been God's purpose, it cannot be considered unnatural that he should have given such gradual intimations of it as are conveyed in the Jewish law and history. The existence of such intimations affords strong evidence to us at the present day; confirming other testimony, and proving the truth of what is implied throughout the Gospel, that the crucifixion of Jesus was the divine purpose from the earliest ages. It might have afforded in a higher degree this evidence to a Jew. When the teachers of the Gospel first claimed his attention, "the Jew should have reasoned thus with himself: Do they say that Jesus died for our redemption? So did the blood of the paschal lamb preserve our whole nation in Egypt. Did he ascend afterwards into heaven? So did our high priest go yearly into the most holy place, carrying thither the blood of a sacrifice slain in the

worldly sanctuary. Is there no remission of sins without shedding of blood? There certainly was none under the law. Has Jesus appointed a baptism with water? So had our law its purifications for the washing away of uncleanness. Numberless other questions might be asked, which would bring their own answers with them out of the law of Moses; and such was the use which the Jew ought to have made of it."[1]

I think, then, it must be allowed that the existence of these points in the Jewish law and history, affords additional authority to the Christian religion, instead of diminishing anything from it. That it did not grow naturally out of the Jewish religion, is clear, as was before shown; because it opposed the existing opinions of those who professed that religion at the time of its promulgation. If I divert into a new channel a stream which has been long flowing in its native bed, and so make it contribute to serve and aid some important purpose, that effect cannot be ascribed to the natural current of the stream, which, but for my interference, would have continued to flow on as before. My purpose may, indeed, receive great advantage from the stream originally existing. But the new direction has a cause independent of the original stream. So in the case we are considering: a party of adventurers, educated, as far as they were educated at all, in a

[1] Jones on Figurative Language of Scripture.

bigoted attachment to the practice of their ancestors, rise up and oppose the current of the national belief: announce the termination of their law, and point out indications in their ancient history and institutions, which prove that such was the original purpose of its author. But whence came the impulse which urged them to this attempt? And how came they to meet with confirmation and collateral support from institutions and occurrences over which they could have no control?

These difficulties vanish, if we believe that the Christian religion really came from God. Allowing this, we should expect it to agree with his former revelation, and to belong to a connected plan. And it does so in a remarkable degree. It gives to the leading features of the Jewish law a consistency which they are otherwise in want of, and it affixes a reasonable signification to facts which cannot otherwise be easily explained. It does not only fulfil prophetic words, but accomplishes prophetic facts. It enables us to trace, through the Jewish Scriptures, a definite purpose, carried on in connection with the whole history there recorded. This purpose is man's redemption from the consequences of the temptation and the fall of our first parents. We have first an early but obscure promise, that one born of woman should destroy the author of that ruin.[1] Many ages afterwards, one is selected as father of the race from

[1] Gen. vii. 15.

which the promised Deliverer should spring, and in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed.[1] The family of that father became the subject of a history extending through twenty centuries—a history of a separate and peculiar people, rendered so by the possession and observance of an elaborate law, and sustained by various instances of Divine power exerted in its defence and preservation. The main article of the law, and principle of the religion, was the acknowledgment of one God, the Creator of the world, in contradiction to the polytheism and idolatry which prevailed around, and formed the only religion of the surrounding world.

The original lawgiver expressly taught his people to expect hereafter another leader, or prophet, whom they should be bound to obey.[2] The expectation of this Deliverer prevailed throughout the whole history of the nation; and his advent was alluded to, and his character described, by prophets, who professed to speak as inspired by God. At length, as we believe, the original promise was fulfilled, and the national expectation verified; and the supernatural birth was announced of "a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord."[3] Let it, then, be granted that persons desiring to promulgate an imposture and establish a new system of religion, would gladly take advantage of the Mosaic law and the prophetic writings, and the events recorded in the history of the Hebrew

[1] Gen. xii. 1—3. [2] Deut. xviii. 50. [3] Luke xi. 11.

people. But it would still remain to be accounted for, how there came to be such a people, and such writings, and such a law, and such events. For such things were. And that such things could have been, except according to a Divine purpose carried out by a Divine power, is far more incredible than anything which the Scriptures of the New Testament require us to believe.

II. It may be thought, further, that a design like that sceptically attributed to the followers of Jesus, would be greatly assisted by the prophecies recorded in their national Scriptures, and pointing to some remarkable personage who was expected to appear.

1. For example: the time of this appearance was fixed by the prophet Daniel at about four hundred and ninety years from his own days, which so closely corresponded with the birth of Jesus, that such an event was looked for, by "devout persons," at the very period when it occurred.[1] This would be, as was before observed, a circumstance greatly in their favour.

2. The next thing to be considered by the framers of this deceit, would be the place of their leader's birth. Jesus was born at Bethlehem. Upon consulting their Scriptures, they would find this passage respecting Bethlehem: "Thou Bethlehem Ephratah,

[1] Dan. ix. 24. Luke ii. 25.

though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be a ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been of old, from everlasting." [1] This would prove, beyond what could be anticipated, an assistance to their design.

3. It seems to be intimated in the prophecies, that the Deliverer who was to come should be preceded by a forerunner, who might awaken the attention of the people to him. For it was written, "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God." [2] And again, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me; and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come into his temple." [3] Now, it was notorious that a singular character, John, called "the Baptist," had appeared a short time before Jesus began his ministry, pretending to be his messenger, and nothing more, and directing his followers to one who was to "come after him." This was another coincidence equally wonderful and favourable. [4]

4. Further, as to the most important point; the way in which Jesus had lived, and been received, and

[1] Micah v. 2. [2] Isai. xi. 3. [3] Malach iii. 1.

[4] If it should be thought that there is too much assumption here, in taking it for granted that the ministry of the Baptist, and the time and place of the birth of Jesus, were real facts, the objection has been met and answered in Chap. I. p. 6—12.

died. His character, as represented in the Gospels, had been peculiar in every respect; but especially remarkable for the union of meekness and constancy which it displayed.

Of unknown origin and humble parentage, he had attracted considerable notice, and many followers; yet he had not been generally acknowledged among his countrymen, and those who adhered to him were not the great and powerful. His life, upon the whole, was one of trial and hardship, not one of triumph and exaltation. In the end, he was sentenced to death, with those notoriously wicked; and suffered a punishment which even his judge confessed that his conduct had not deserved. Yet though dying with malefactors, he was laid in a rich and honourable tomb.[1]

A character answering this description was portrayed by that prophet, who had always been considered as most particular in what respected the future Messiah. "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground; he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid, as it were, our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him

[1] Matt. xxvii. 57–60.

not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth." [1]

It cannot be denied that the existence of these ancient prophecies would be very advantageous to men setting out with the purpose in question. But it is time to ask, in our turn, how they came to find these prophecies ready to their hand? Prophecies of such a nature, that no man could have contrived a scheme dependent upon them, because they could not command the facts by which they were to be fulfilled. With respect to the birthplace,

[1] Isai. liii.

for example: in order that it might happen to be Bethlehem, it was requisite that a general census should be held, convening all the inhabitants of the country to their chief town; by which means alone the mother of Jesus was called away from her usual residence, and her infant born at Bethlehem, instead of Nazareth. The preparatory ministry of the Baptist was equally beyond the control of the disciples. So were the minute details of incidents, which agree in a wonderful manner with the circumstantial narrative. The entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem, at once humble and triumphant[1]:—the manner of his death, and his own countrymen the cause[2]:—the peculiar indignities which he underwent: the very words of mockery used against him[3]:—the price which

[1] "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion: behold, thy king cometh unto thee; he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass."—Compare Matt. xxi. 1, &c.; and Zech. ix. 9.

[2] "And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thy hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends."—Zech. xiii. 6.

[3] "I gave my back to the smiters; and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.—Isai. l. 6. "The assembly of the wicked have inclosed me. They pierced my hands and my feet: they stand staring and looking upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, and shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him; let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him."—Ps. xxii. "They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."—Ps. lxix. 20. Compare Matt. xxvii.

Judas received for his treachery:—the purpose to which that money was applied.[1]

Passages of this nature could not have been introduced by the Apostles into the existing Scriptures, because, as their countrymen were generally hostile to the design, such an attempt must have proved fatal to their pretensions. And further, because the books among which these scattered sentences are found, had now been extensively diffused during a period of three hundred years in a foreign language, defying the imposture of the whole nation, if the whole nation had concurred in the design.

We are reduced, then, to the necessity of supposing, that the followers of Jesus, desiring to deify their teacher, selected from their national Scriptures these pointed allusions to circumstances like his which happened to be written there, and brought them forward to confirm his pretensions.

But surely to ascribe coincidences like these to accident; to allege that all these passages were thrown out at random in the Jewish Scriptures, and that the circumstances of the birth, and life, and character, and death of Jesus turned out so as to agree with them; is to attribute to accident what never did or could take place without design; and in

[1] "They weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter; a goodly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord."—Zech. xi. 12. Matt. xxvi. 15; xxvii. 3, &c.

itself far more improbable than the event which such a solution is intended to disprove. For, allow to Jesus the authority which he claims, and every difficulty vanishes. We should then expect to find prophetic intimations of his great purpose, and of the way in which it was to be effected. We should expect to find them, too, just what they are; not united and brought together in a way of formal description, which could only be a provision for imposture; but such scattered hints and allusions as after the event has occurred serve to show that it was predicted, by a comparison of the event and the prophecy.

It ought to be observed, in addition, that if the disciples of Jesus had framed their story and their representation of facts, with a view of obtaining this collateral support, they would have been more diligent and ostentatious in pointing out the circumstances of resemblance. They would have anticipated the labours of those writers who have made it their business to show the completion of prophecy in the events related in the Gospels. But, on the contrary, they bring these things forward in an historical, rather than an argumentative way; and commonly leave the deductions which may be drawn from them to the discernment of after times.

On these grounds I think myself justified in concluding, that the divine mission of Jesus receives a

strong confirmation from the historical facts, the ceremonial rites, and the ancient prophecies which corresponded with the circumstances of his life, and the alleged object of his ministry and sufferings.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE PHRASEOLOGY OF THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES.

In examining the Christian writings, I am struck with the original and peculiar phrases by which the teachers of the Gospel recommended it to the notice of their countrymen. We have seen that they were innovators in doctrine. They were innovators in language too. Their writings abound with terms which can only be understood by reference to these doctrines, which were novel when they were first used; and, although they have now obtained such universal currency as to sound familiar to our ears, derive their meaning entirely from the religion which they were employed to communicate and explain.

1. "Behold, I bring you GOOD TIDINGS of great joy, which shall be to all people."[1] It is remarkable, that these words assume the truth of all which the religion purposes to declare. These good tidings were, that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto

[1] Luke ii. 10.

them." But why should this be proclaimed as good tidings to those who were feeling no distress, who had no anxiety under the apprehension that God was at enmity with them?

Again, the proper term by which the religion was distinguished, was not the law of Christ, or the doctrine of Jesus, as might be expected; but the good tidings; the message of joy. Jesus, we are told, went about "preaching the Gospel," i.e. the glad tidings "of the kingdom of God." His command was, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the glad tidings to every creature." Paul declares, that his object was to "testify the glad tidings of the grace of God." He says that Christ commissioned him to preach the joyful message: i.e. the Gospel.[1]

Now, though it was very soon after the promulgation of the religion, that the word signifying *good tidings*, which we translate *Gospel*, became comprehensively used for the religion itself;[2] yet there must have been a time when it bore no such meaning; but simply expressed to those who heard it the idea of favourable news.[3] When it expressed this

[1] Mark i. 15; xvi. 15. Acts xx. 24. 1 Cor. i. 17.

[2] Mark viii. 35. Rom. i. 1. 1 Thes. i. 5. 1 Tim. i. 11.

[3] "The Greek verb εὐαγγελιον, when first used by the Evangelists; or the Hebrew *bashar*, when used by the prophets; or the Syriac *sabar*, as most probably used by our Lord and his Apostles, conveyed to their countrymen only one and the same idea, which is precisely what the phrase, *to bring good tidings*, conveys to us."—Campbell, Prel. Disc. i. 149.

Εὐαγγελιον, translated Gospel, bears the sense of *good news* five

idea, and this idea alone, the authors of Christianity seized upon it to communicate the import of the religion which they intended to teach. And yet to understand that import, requires a previous knowledge of what the religion declares. To believe that it brings good tidings, is to admit its truth. If, indeed, the new religion had consisted merely in a promise of eternal happiness to all who embraced it, we could more easily account for the term by which it was introduced. But the answer to the question which must have been often put, What good tidings do you acquaint us with? would be to this effect: God has so loved the world as to send his only Son to make atonement for sin, "that all that believe in him may not perish, may be saved from everlasting condemnation, and enjoy everlasting life." The angels, who made known to the shepherds the birth of Jesus, are represented as giving this very explanation. I bring you good tidings, "for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a *Saviour*." Those who have been brought to acknowledge the promises on which the Gospel rests, will understand that these are glad tidings. But surely it is not language which any set of men, undertaking the scheme ascribed to the Apostles, would stumble upon by accident, or select from deliberation. It would not naturally occur: and it

times in the Septuagint: once, *the reward of good news*. The word Gospel, in its Saxon etymology, is an exact counterpart of the Greek εὐαγγελιον.—Ibid.

would involve them in unnecessary difficulties. They would surely have chosen some term more simple and less embarrassing.

2. Another term which is frequently used to express the new religion, conducts us to the same conclusion. Our translators render it GRACE. The original word simply bears the meaning of *favour, kindness,* or *mercy;* and, of course, when put for the religion itself, must imply that this was viewed in the light of mercy or favour. Thus it was contrasted with the Jewish dispensation. "We are not under the law, but under grace, i.e. mercy."—"The law was given by Moses, but grace (favour, mercy) came by Jesus Christ."[1] So when the disciples are exhorted to constancy in their profession, this is expressed by their continuing "in the grace of God:" implying that this religion had restored them to his favour.[2] By unworthy conduct, on the other hand, some are said to have "fallen from his grace," or mercy; and others are warned against similar transgression, lest they should "receive the grace" or favour "of God in vain."[3] This again displays, in a strong light, the view which its teachers entertained of the nature of the religion, and the way in which they had accustomed their converts to regard it, as a merciful interposition on the part of God; and increases the difficulty of supposing that they spoke the language of imposture, and not of conviction.

[1] Rom. vi. 14.; John i. 17. [2] Gal. v. 4. 2 Cor. vi. 1. [3] Acts xiii. 43.

8. There is less to surprise us in the title ascribed by the Apostles to Jesus, as the Saviour, because the Jews were expecting a Deliverer, and that expectation has been supposed to have assisted the progress of the new religion. But the usage of the word SAVED throughout the Christian Scriptures is very peculiar.[1] It is used to signify escape from the divine wrath, in a positive and naked manner, which is different from anything occurring elsewhere, even in the Jewish writings.[2] "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners."—"It pleased God to save them that believed."—"I became all things to all men, that I might save some."—"Who then shall be saved?"—"Are there few that shall be saved?"—"The Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved."[3]

This expression is not derived from any ideas previously existing. It originates altogether in the purpose borne on the face of the religion which its authors were employed to introduce. It proves how

[1] Schleusner's interpretation sufficiently shows this:—*σωζεσθαι*, felicem esse, vel fieri; æternam felicitatem consequi; amplecti religionem Christianam, et per eam emendari ac remissionem peccatorum et felicitatem perennem obtinere. So that the word *σωζεσθαι* cannot be adequately rendered, except by a periphrasis to this effect: "To embrace the Christian faith, and through that to obtain pardon of sin, and eternal happiness."

[2] The passage most similar and with least reference to temporal deliverance, is found in Jeremiah, xvii. 14. *Ιασαι με, κυριε, και ιαθησομαι· σωσον με, και σωθησομαι, οτι καυχημα μου συ ει.*

[3] *Τους σωζομενους*· those (that were) saved. Acts ii. 47.

closely the object professed by that religion was interwoven with the thoughts and imprinted on the language of its teachers. To embrace Christianity, was to be saved. A confidence in the truth of what they preached is implied in this, which could scarcely be assumed where it was not felt, and scarcely be felt without strong grounds for conviction.

4. The word translated RIGHTEOUSNESS, also bears an entirely new sense in the Christian Scriptures. Its original meaning is justice, integrity; sometimes, goodness, benignity. In the Gospel it often carries a distinct meaning, acquittal or acceptance with God.

We read of "the righteousness of God which is by faith in Jesus Christ:" we read, that "the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith; but Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness."[1] These, and many other sentences of the same import, are absolutely unintelligible without an acquaintance with the religion to which they refer. But when the principles of the Christian doctrine are explained, we perceive what is meant, namely, that the heathens, who, being ignorant of their Creator, sought no acquaintance with him, have obtained acquittal through faith in Christ; but that the Jews, who did seek acceptance with him

[1] Rom. iii. 22; ix. 30, 31.

through observance of the Mosaic law, have not obtained acquittal. So the Christian faith is called the "way of righteousness;" its doctrine, "the word of righteousness;" its ministers, "the ministers of righteousness;" its profession, "the righteousness of God." When these phrases are examined, they are found to imply, that righteousness, i. e. justification in the sight of God, as a moral Governor, and acquittal before him as our Judge, is to be obtained in no other way than through reliance on the atonement made by Jesus on the cross. And this usage of the word is only warranted by the fact which is the groundwork of the Gospel: that God has covenanted to accept those as righteous, i. e. as justified in his sight, who embrace the way of salvation offered in the Gospel. The belief is strongly impressed upon our natural feelings, that, "if there is a God, he must delight in virtue." But experience universally declares, that no human virtue will bear examination according to the law of perfect holiness. Tried, therefore, by that law, no man is righteous, acquitted, or justified in the sight of God. This opens the way for "the righteousness of faith;" for that justification or acceptance with God which follows a trust in Jesus. And such is the new sense which is attached to the word righteousness by the Apostles.[1]

[1] Δικαιοσυνη, Justitia, est doctrina Christi, Matt. v. 10: vi. 33; xxi. 32. 2 Pet. ii. 21; et in Epistolâ ad Romanos *passim*. Wetstein.

Now, we know that it is a long process by which a word comes to bear a particular sense, especially if that sense be complex, and includes more than one idea. The process is more difficult when the word is of common use, and is wrested from its natural or conventional meaning. So that we may reasonably be surprised to find that a word so familiar as that which expresses justice or goodness, should, within the short space of fifteen or twenty years, be habitually employed to signify acquittal before God, or all that is contained in the theological term *justification*. The idea that justification is to be sought through Jesus, must have been familiar to the mind of the writers, in a degree which can scarcely be imagined without supposing personal conviction.

The employment of this ordinary word in an extraordinary signification, proves also the novelty

The title, "the Lord our righteousness," Jer. xxiii. 6, is easily explained from the New Testament; but without it, would not have established any such doctrine. It is scarcely necessary, in the present day, to allude to Taylor's bold substitution of the words *deliverance* or *salvation* for *righteousness*. If St. Paul, in the first chapters of his Epistle to the Romans, is not inquiring how mankind may be justified, in a forensic sense, at the bar of God, he cannot be said to *argue* at all. Neither does he argue, according to Taylor's translation. As in the passage, "that he might be *gracious*, and the *justifier* of him that believeth in Jesus." Where is the antithesis of the original, εἰς το εἶναι αὐτον ΔΙΚΑΙΟΝ και ΔΙΚΑΙΟΥΝΤΑ τον ἐκ πιστεως Ιησου? And what would be the purpose of the succeeding question, "where is boasting then?" So again, Taylor translates, Rom. iv. 3 :—Abraham believed, and it was counted to him for a *grant of favour*; and, v. 5, his faith is counted for *salvation*. Paraph. on Rom. ch. 16, in his "Key to the Apostolic Writings."

of the doctrine conveyed by it. Had there been nothing original in that doctrine, it would not have required an original term. Had the Christian religion been nothing more than a modification of the Jewish faith, the phrases which had been employed in the one would not have been changed, or have extended their signification, in the other.

5. The corruption of human nature, and the necessity of regeneration, as it was the professed cause of his appearance in the world, so it forms a prominent part of the teaching of Jesus and his Apostles. This leads to the usage of the word FLESH and its derivatives, for corrupt nature, in a sense altogether original.[1] "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." "The natural (or animal) man cannot receive the things of God."[2] What a volume of doctrine is concentrated in these short sentences! To "live in the flesh," to "walk after the flesh," are phrases familiarly used in Scripture for a life led after the natural desires and propensities of the heart. But what meaning have they, till the difference between the spiritual and carnal life is first established? till it is understood to be the object of a religion divinely instituted, to take men out of a state of nature, in which they are enemies of God through the corruption that is in them, and to renew their hearts after

[1] The existence of the term in the Septuagint, Gen. vi. 3, will hardly be thought to invalidate this assertion.

[2] John iii. 6. Ψυχικος. 1 Cor. ii. 14. The natural or animal contrasted with the spiritual man. See Schleusner.

the divine image, which bears the stamp of "righteousness and true holiness?"[1] These do not sound like the inventions of human teachers. It could hardly be a self-instructed or unauthorized reformer who first laid down the distinction, "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit."[2]

6. The word FAITH affords a similar instance. For by the terms faith, or believing, in the New Testament, that is not generally meant which is required, as of course, in the case of any divine revelation, a belief of its truth, and a patient expectation of its promises. The sense which the word often bears in the Apostle's language is as peculiar as the doctrine on which its meaning depends is original. Faith is represented as the channel through which the benefits of the death of Jesus are conveyed to the believer. For as the doctrine of Christianity is, that he has undertaken to deliver from divine wrath all who trust in him, and to bestow on them eternal happiness: the characteristic of the religion is faith; and those who are invited to receive the religion, are invited to rely upon Jesus; to put their confidence in him; to depend upon him.

To see the force of this argument, consider the phrases: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." "Do we then make void

[1] See Col. iii. 10. Eph. iv. 24. [2] John iii. 6.

the law through faith?" "The Gentiles have attained the righteousness which is of faith."[1] All this, written within twenty years of the death of Jesus, shows the substantial and solid form which the religion early attained, and the deep roots which its leading doctrine had struck. The words, *trust in Christ; by trust we are saved;*—what idea would they convey, when heard for the first time? How much must be explained, to render them intelligible? Yet all this had been so explained as to become familiar, and to enable the Apostles to write, without circumlocution, of salvation through faith in him, who, but a few years before, had been despised, rejected, and condemned.

Even to this day the phrases here discussed would appear too singular, too technical for general conversation, or writings of a general nature. How can this be accounted for, if there was nothing extraordinary in their origin, nothing beyond the thoughts naturally occurring to men, and very ordinary men?[2]

Here, again, I cannot fail to observe, that this is exactly what we should expect if the religion were divine. It was an original revelation of the purpose of God. Therefore it required fresh phrases to convey it. For words follow ideas. If the ideas were new, they could not be expressed without some innovation in language. But can we be contented with

[1] Acts xvi. 31. Rom. v. 1; iii. 31; ix. 30.
[2] See Foster's Essays, iv. Letter 111, p. 296.

believing, that such an innovation was attempted and effected by such persons as the first Christian teachers were, if they were not what they professed to be; i. e. if they had no authority to warrant them, and procure them attention? Did such men give a new turn to language, and strike out notions which they could not even express in terms hitherto employed?

CHAPTER VI.

AGREEMENT OF CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES WITH SUBSEQUENT EXPERIENCE.

In the previous chapters it has been my object to show, that the preachers of Christianity, when they taught the religion which they introduced, could derive no assistance from the existing opinions or prejudices of their country; but that, in truth, instead of following, they opposed them all, or directed them into a new channel. In a word, their doctrines were original.

But in addition to the remarkable fact that men who, by the consent of all antiquity, are known to have been uneducated and obscure, should deviate by accident, or strike out by design, into so much consistent originality: I observe, further, that these writings indicate, in the writers, a wonderful foreknowledge of the manner in which their original doctrines should be received, and of the effects which they should hereafter produce.

There was nothing in the situation, habits, or education of a Jew, which was likely to inspire him with the knowledge required in order to these predictions.

He had been bred up in a country which was not the general resort of foreigners, or of people of various sentiments, manners, and religions; but where opinion had run, to a remarkable degree, in an uniform channel. The mind of a native of one of the provinces of Judea had never, probably, in its most active state, speculated beyond the dispute between his countrymen and the Samaritans, concerning their national privileges, or between the Pharisees and Sadducees concerning a resurrection, or between the strict and the lax interpreters of the Mosaic law. There is nothing contradictory to this notion in the few apocryphal books which have come down to us, as specimens of the Jewish writings. They contain allusions to the history of their ancestors, fictions respecting angels, visions of heavenly things;—and in consequence of the advantage which the writers enjoyed from an acquaintance with the prophetic and other sacred books, they often surprise us with sublime and magnificent speculations concerning God and his judgments; but they exhibit few traces of human character or conduct; little of discriminate knowledge of mankind. Their style is as different from that of the Christian Scriptures, as the book of Psalms from the books of the Evangelists, or the prophecies of Isaiah from the epistles of Paul.

The Christian Scriptures, especially the five historical books, are of a very different description; indeed very unlike anything that might be expected

from writers of that age or country. They abound with the knowledge of men. They are full of scenes and characters, which if they were not real, not copied from the life, but invented by the power of the imagination, discover a dramatic spirit which would hardly have confined itself to the fictitious narrative of the proceedings of a "sect every where spoken against." Evidence of this kind is not of a nature to be drawn out into proofs, and put into syllogistic form; but it is not the less forcible: and is such as every reader may judge of, who will take the trouble to look through the history with this idea in view.

It has indeed been objected, that the origin of the several Gospel narratives is obscure. We know that they were received by the early church, and ascribed to their respective authors from the beginning; but we have scanty information as to the manner in which they were compiled. In some of the circumstances related there are too many minute variations to allow of their having been written in concert: and yet they coincide with one another so closely, as to prove that the authors had similar means of information.

The difficulty is cleared up, if we listen to their own explanation. They had an express promise that the Spirit of God should "teach them all things," when the time of their mission arrived, and "bring all things to their remembrance, whatever

their Master had said unto them."[1] It was a needful provision. No memory could have retained either the things that were done or the discourses which were uttered during the three years when the Apostles accompanied Jesus in his journeys through Judea. Yet if these had not been recorded, and faithfully recorded, the whole purpose would have been frustrated; there could have been no revelation.

It is only by allowing as real the transactions of the day of Pentecost, when three thousand persons were added to the disciples, whose numbers were daily increased and increasing,—that we find a natural explanation of the composition of the Gospels. These new disciples would be in constant intercourse with the twelve, and earnestly inquire from those appointed witnesses the particulars of the ministry which they had attended. Those particulars would be committed to writing, at first in a disjointed form. There would be occasional differences in circumstantials, together with a general agreement in essentials. The exact order of events was comparatively unimportant. By degrees, these separate memoirs would become numerous, collected from the mouths of the different Apostles; till, in the end, the four Evangelists collected the scattered and fragmentary records, and each produced the Gospel which bears his name. Throughout the whole, the promise of heavenly assistance and superintendence

[1] 1 John xiv. 26.

would be fulfilled. We deny the divinity of Jesus altogether, if we do not admit that he provided for the establishment and continued promulgation of his religion. That the Son of God should have taken man's nature; that in that nature he should have lived for man's instruction, and died for man's redemption: and yet have made no provision for an authentic record of his words and actions; this it is impossible to suppose, unless we deny his divinity altogether. And therefore when the record of his words and actions was to be committed to permanent writing, he would supply the defect of the historian's natural powers, and preserve them from material error. Without allowing this, the Christian faith would have no sound or firm foundation.

But, together with an unsound foundation, it would present an insuperable difficulty. It would leave the existence of the five historical narratives unaccounted for. We are told, indeed, that "there is no appearance in their writings that the Evangelists or Apostles had an inward gift, or were subject to any power exterior to them different from that of preaching or teaching, which they daily exercised."[1] But, in fact, the faculty of preaching and teaching, which they daily exercised, is the evidence of an "inward gift;" and we require no other. "What invention of man could have devised discourses which by common consent differ from all sayings of men;

[1] Essay vii. p. 345. See Appendix, No. 11.

which possess this character unaltered, notwithstanding their transmission through men of various mental organization; which contain things impossible to be understood or appreciated by their reporters at the time when they profess to have been uttered; which enwrap the seeds of all human improvement yet attained, and evidently are full of power for more."[1]

For we find concentrated in the Gospels a description of characters which, when they were originally pourtrayed, had no living model, but were to arise out of circumstances in which the conduct of mankind had not hitherto been seen or tried. Without assuming the truth of the Gospel, we may acknowledge that wherever it is received, whether justly or not, as of divine authority, it has placed men in a new situation: by discovering to them relations not before apprehended, by opening to them prospects not before known, by awakening faculties not before exercised. But the Gospel displays, within itself, a prophetic insight into the behaviour of men under these new relations and in this untried condition. And, more remarkably still, that insight is commonly shown by allusions and hints not fully developed, but which manifested in the original author of them a perfect acquaintance with circumstances and cases which should arise hereafter. Declarations, warnings, descriptions occur, which require a key. The cha-

[1] Alford's Greek Test., i. 17.

racters or circumstances which the Gospel has produced, supply that key. But could such men as first set out to preach the Gospel, have possessed this foreknowledge? Could any man have possessed it? If they had ventured to conjecture at all upon a subject so uncertain as human conduct in a case so delicate as religion, would their conjectures have been verified by the subsequent experience of eighteen hundred years? What would have been thought of Columbus, if, instead of merely persevering till he reached a country of whose existence he was assured, he had undertaken to describe the rivers, mountains, or inhabitants which it contained, and the reception he should meet with there? And if he had hazarded such a prophecy, and the event had turned out according to his predictions, we should look upon him as something more than an enterprising adventurer.

The discourses, however, attributed to Jesus, are full of anticipatory warnings and precepts, which show that the whole map of the future proceedings of his disciples was laid, as it were, open to his view. And many of these presumed on consequences from the doctrines to be promulgated, some of which would not have seemed probable beforehand to human expectations, and others would not have been openly declared by an impostor, if they had been foreseen.

I. One instance of this nature was the PERSECUTION which Jesus taught his disciples to expect. It was

not, indeed, unnatural to anticipate that a nation, so bigoted as the Jews, should oppose the introduction of a religion which was to supersede their law; or that even the idolatrous Gentiles, however in their ordinary conduct uninfluenced by religion, should display an attachment to their superstitions when an attempt was made to shake them, which their previous apathy had concealed. Therefore no argument could be justly founded upon the prophecy, if it were merely written in general, "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the Gospel's, the same shall save it."[1] Some such encouragement as this must be held out by every enthusiast; as it was by Mohammed, when he reserved extraordinary rewards for any proselyte who should fall in battle in defence of his faith.

But the mode in which the persecution of Christians is spoken of, is not in the way of an ordinary command to maintain the faith or support the authority of their Master. It discovers an exact acquaintance with the sort of attack which they would commonly be forced to undergo. "Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake." "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake."[2] "Blessed are ye, when

[1] Mark viii. 35.

[1] Matt. v. 10, 11.

men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake."[1] "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more them of his household?"[2] "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you."[3] "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified."[4]

It is clearly intimated in these passages, that the persecution of Christians should be for righteousness' sake; that the peculiar piety and strictness of life demanded of them by their faith in Jesus, and practised for his sake, should be generally disliked, and cast in their teeth as a reproach. And it is a certain fact, that this species of persecution has existed under the dispensation of the Gospel. Yet why was it to be previously expected? That the name of Jesus should be odious to those who found their prejudices assaulted, or their interests endangered, was sufficientcy natural. But that the particular objection made to his disciples should be taken from their adherence to the strictest rules of temperance, moderation, and piety; in short, should be for

[1] Luke vi. 22. [2] Matt. x. 25. [3] John xv. 18.
[4] 2 Tim. iii. 12. 1 Pet. iv. 14..

righteousness' sake; arose from a trait of human nature which had not been before exhibited, and could only be foreseen by him who "knew what was in man." It had not been before exhibited, because no philosophical teachers, such as the world had hitherto seen, had made the duties relating to a man's self, or those which regard God, equally binding, and defined them as strictly, as those which concern his neighbour; respecting which it has never been pretended that any one can be too exact or too fearful of offending. But, indisputably, the habits of personal virtue, of purity, sobriety, moderation, patience, humility, which distinguish the early Christians, were one cause of the abhorrence in which they were held in the early ages. For it was not an uncommon species of trial to solicit them to the commission of crimes which their religion forbade, with no less an offer than exemption from martyrdom.

And this, I argue, could not have been foreseen by mere human intelligence. It was a new case: it was an improbable case: not that those whose situation might oblige them to reprove or restrain the vices of others, should become objects of hatred; this might have been anticipated; but that silent piety, conscientious temperance, unresisting patience, should be treated as contemptible, and opposed as pernicious. Yet this case was clearly anticipated and provided for by the authors of the Gospel. It

was anticipated, not as arising from the mischief of such deportment, which cannot be pretended; but from the nature of the human heart. That the seat of the enmity was known to be deeply buried there, is intimated in the warning given, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."[1] Here it is predicted, first, that the disciples of Jesus should form "a peculiar people," opposing, in their general conduct, "the course of this world;" and further, that even under the success and dominion of Christianity, they should be surrounded by many who despise and avoid them. And thus hitherto it has ever proved. For there have always been many, in a nominally Christian community, who have made a law for themselves altogether distinct from the Christian law: there have been always two different schemes of morality current at the same time, of which the one may be called the strict, or austere, and the other the liberal or loose system: one, that is, which takes man's opinion for its standard: the other, which is regulated by God's word.[2]

Therefore, although many points are to be found in which the Christian who is true to his profession agrees with those who acknowledge no such obliga-

[1] John xv. 19.

[2] Smith's Wealth of Nations, B. v. ch. i. See also Paley's Moral Philosophy, B. i. ch. 2, with his description of the Law of Honour.

tion; there are other points in which they must always differ; and that difference will be followed by contempt, or dislike, or ridicule, in a greater or less degree, according to the respective characters of the parties; according as the one is more or less under the control of conscience, and the other more or less gifted with talents or discretion. The Christian cannot resent an injury; cannot join in loose discourse; cannot countenance diversions which favour the corruption of the heart; cannot be a gamester, for example; cannot be indifferent as to the employment of his time: he cannot, therefore, be a favourite with men who have no views beyond this world. For the declarations of the Gospel have never yet taken such general hold in a community, that strictness in these points has not been singular, and therefore, in many instances, been attended with the consequences of being singular in a crowd.

The sentences which allude to the severest of all trials, that of being "reviled, and spoken evil of falsely," and encourage Christians to suffer such a trial patiently, display a similar foresight of the peculiar lot which awaited them. Professing, beyond others, the zealous service of God, they were accused of atheism; and renouncing beyond others the profligate habits which generally prevailed, their characters were aspersed with the foulest calumnies. From all the early accounts respecting the treatment of Christians, and the opinions which were current

concerning them, we learn that there was no crime of which they were not accused; nor any virtue which was not construed into a crime when it belonged to them. They were called useless members of society, because they did not struggle for temporal advancement. In the persecution under Domitian, among others whose names have been neglected by history, Flavius Clemens, a relative of the emperor, was put to death. The historian who relates the fact, accuses Clemens of the most despicable indolence;[1] probably, because he had shown an indifference to worldly honours, though his two sons had been destined to succeed to the throne of the Cæsars. The reasonable and philosophical Pliny, though he could not find any subject of animadversion against the Christians in his province, had no hesitation in punishing their inflexible obstinacy.[2] The Stoic Marcus characterizes in the same manner their readiness to die for their religion;[3] and thus gave just cause for the complaint of their apologist,[4] that the patience and resolution which were admired in Regulus, were condemned in a Christian. The historians of that age, who speak of them, betray a malevolence of hatred which must have required all the encouragement that a prophetic warning was

[1] Suet. Domit. ch. xv. On this accusation, see Tertull. Apol. c. 42.
[2] Plin. Lib. x. Ep. 91.
[3] Medit. Lib. ii. s. 3.
[4] Tertull. Apol. c. 40.

calculated to supply.[1] Public misfortunes were attributed to them in the light of judgments.[2] It was a constant subject of remonstrance with the writers who defend their cause,[3] that the most nefarious practices were said to take place at their private meetings. Pliny mentions with evident surprise the description which he obtained of their assemblies, as being attended with no worse evil than an engagement to abstain from crime.[4]

Traces of the same unreasonable enmity, whenever Christianity becomes an operative principle, may be discovered throughout the whole history of

[1] "Per flagitia invisos vulgus Christianos appellabat." — Tacitus. "Christiani, genus hominum superstitionis novæ et maleficæ."— Suetonius. "Superstitio prava et immodica."—Pliny.

[2] Tertul. Apol. 20.

[3] Justin Martyr, Apol. 1.; which led Antoninus Pius to denounce capital punishment against false accusers of Christians; an edict which wonderfully illustrates and confirms Matt. v. 11.

[4] "Christians have been called superstitious, and yet they have been called atheists; when particulars come to be examined, the superstition appears to be, professing a religion very different from that of their ancestors; and the atheism, despising all the heathen gods, and holding no communion with their worshippers, as such. Christians have been called low, and illiterate, and mean, and yet they have been called wise, versed in magic and necromancy; on examination, their vulgarity seems to have been nothing more than plainness and industry in useful occupations; their powers of magic, miraculous powers. Lastly, Christians have been called lazy and indolent, and yet they have been called restless and busy; their indolence was a want of the common endeavours to get money; so that they had nothing to give the gods; their restlessness, a great assiduity in doing good, in succouring their distressed brethren; and perhaps in converting their acquaintance to Christianity."—Hey's Lectures, B. I. ch. xviii. s. xi

the Church. When the Reformers first began to awaken the Christian world from its long continued lethargy, calumnies bore an important part among the various weapons by which they were opposed. And even in happier and more enlightened times, there is often great want of candour and indulgence in the treatment of those who stand remarkably forward in religion. Their motives have been often misrepresented, their faults exaggerated; they have been condemned for those ardent feelings, and that active zeal in religion, which in any other case would be considered honourable; the very titles by which as Christians they are characterized in their own Scriptures, have been alleged against them as a reproach. All this, to us, is matter of experience; but how came it to be to Jesus a subject of prophecy? How came he to foresee that his followers should be treated more harshly and judged more severely than other men, simply because they are his followers, and, in obedience to his precepts, "take up their cross daily, and deny themselves?"

II. Another prediction of the same nature, equally improbable at a distance, and equally verified by the result, is that which foretold the divisions and dissensions that should accompany the propagation of the Gospel. "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: for from henceforth there shall be five in one house

divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." "And a man's foes shall be they of his own household."[1]

This prediction has been accurately fulfilled in the primitive ages, and at various subsequent periods when the Church has been subject to persecution. The early defenders of Christianity made it a formal complaint, that the nearest relations, when any occasion of dispute happened, revenged themselves on the objects of their enmity, by laying an accusation against them as Christians, which rendered them liable to examination, imprisonment, or death.[2]

But the words go farther than this, and imply, that from the time when the religion which Jesus was now teaching should have possession in the world, difference of opinion would prevail concerning it which would prove stronger than natural affection, and require natural affection to be sacrificed. For the abandonment of relations and friends is included among the duties which his followers may be called to exercise; and he affirms, whoever "loveth

[1] Luke xii. 51. Matt. x. 36. As in the words of the prophet, Micah vii. 6, but by the prophet differently applied.

[2] See Milner, Church History, i. 207; and an interesting example which he cites from Justin, p. 191.

father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."[1]

Did it appear probable that such should be the effect of a religion like the Christian? which inculcates peace, forbearance, charity, good-will towards all men; which allows no lower measure of love to others than that which we bear towards ourselves; which prohibits envy, by teaching humility; which restrains anger, by requiring meekness and patience; which cuts up malice by the roots, by forbidding the very approach to dissension. Surely an ordinary teacher would not have ventured upon this seeming contradiction between the precepts which he enforced, and the practice which he foretold.

Injunctions such as these: "Not to love the world, nor the things that are in the world;" "not to be conformed to this world;" not to "lay up treasure on earth, but in heaven;" to "resist not evil;" to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness;" with numerous other passages which occur in the Gospel to the same effect; have always been interpreted with different degrees of strictness, even among those who acknowledge their obligation; and have always been practically neglected by many, who nevertheless do not deny the authority from which they proceed. Thus much, it will be thought, was easily deducible from the varieties of human

[1] Matt. x. 37.

character. But was it obvious that these differences would not exist, even among members of the same family, without producing an acrimonious feeling, and often a high degree of rancour and animosity?

Nothing can be more contrary to both the letter and the spirit of the Gospel, than these angry feelings. The Gospel inculcates all those graces and qualities of mind, which soften the impression of dislike resulting from difference of sentiment. It recommends every possible tenderness even towards those who undervalue or neglect religion. It suggests reasons, which, if properly understood or considered, must always prevent those who profess and cordially embrace it, from engaging in vehement contention. Yet experience has proved, that dissensions and enmity are frequently excited from no other cause than an indifference to this world's advantages on the one side, and a pursuit of them on the other.

This was now about to be witnessed for the first time, because Christianity was about to stir up in the world, for the first time to any considerable degree, religious earnestness and sensibility. And its author described from the beginning, even whilst the parts were not yet completed and put together, this powerful moral engine in future operation; he described the results, which should proceed from the new relations under which it brought mankind, and from the new springs of action which it has set at work. An impostor might have done this, where it was

likely to favour his scheme; but would he have done it, where it was likely to raise a prejudice against him? An enthusiast might have attempted this; but would the results have answered his predictions?

III. The argument which I am endeavouring to illustrate, is strongly corroborated by the allusions which the discourses of Jesus contain to the reception which his doctrines should afterwards meet with among mankind.

He assumes, in the first place, that his religion shall spread, and make its way, and establish itself far and wide. It was an original thought, in that age, and warranted by no experience, to conceive the idea of extending a religion throughout the world. The Jewish religion, the one immediately before the eyes of the teachers of Christianity, had existed fifteen hundred years, likewise claiming the authority of the Creator, and fortified by many of the same sanctions; yet had made little progress beyond the bounds of one small territory. No change of importance had occurred in the religions of Syria, Persia, Greece, or Italy. No symptoms appeared that these countries were in a dissatisfied, inquiring state. All was to be awakened and excited. Yet in the midst of this dead calm, and spiritual stagnation, provision is made for proselyting the world. Jesus, when he had no other assistance than that of a few obscure followers, confidently predicts that his

religion shall take root, and extend, and become universal. "The kingdom of heaven," he said, "is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof."[1] And in another comparison, he describes, with astonishing accuracy, the way in which it should gain footing. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."[2] Peculiar as this comparison is, none could be found which should more justly characterize the nature of the progress of the Gospel. Not compelling proselytes by force of arms, as the religion of Mohammed afterwards; but so hidden at first, that we are obliged to seek carefully for traces of its growth in the history of nations; yet maintaining its place, and effecting its purpose; gradually meliorating the laws, and changing the moral aspect of the countries where it was received: and insinuating its renovating views of God and man into the hearts of those with whom it came in contact.[3]

These were bold predictions, if we refer to the time when they were made. Mohammed indeed

[1] Matt. xiii. 31. [2] Ibid. 33.

[3] See this parable beautifully illustrated by Benson, in his Hulsean Lectures, Disc. XI. V. i.

extended his projects widely. But he had the example of Christianity before him, and took it as his pattern. With that example, he would have belied his own pretensions if he had shown a more circumscribed ambition.

So, however, would Jesus, it may be thought, or those who set up his standard. Be it so. I shall not lay stress upon any prophecies which admit of a general application. But many parts of the Christian Scriptures, especially the parables, describe the different sort of treatment which the religion should receive, and the different effects it should produce on different characters, with an exactness attainable by no one to whom the intricate map of the human heart was not laid open; laid open, too, as it should appear after a lapse of very many intervening centuries.

The parable of the sower is remarkable on this ground. "Behold, there went out a sower to sow: and it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up. And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: but when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit. And other fell on good ground, and did yield

fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred."[1]

The sower who goes out to sow his seed, that seed being the word of God, affords a just and lively representation of the manner in which the Gospel was originally taught, and is still maintained and disseminated throughout the world. The sower resembles Jesus and his Apostles, and the Christian teachers, ministers, and missionaries who have succeeded them: and if any one were now describing the office of these various labourers as it has been exercised since the introduction of Christianity, the comparison would be no less obvious than it is apt and natural. But nothing similar had been seen in practice when this parable was delivered. The sower had no prototype in the commentators of the law, the Scribes or Pharisees: nor even in the occasional exhortations and warnings of the prophets: still less among the various priests and hierophants of heathen superstition.

The application of the parable is still more original and extraordinary. It describes, with a sort of graphical illustration, the different reception which was to be expected for the "word of God." The Gospel claimed this authority; and there are four distinct ways, and no more, in which a doctrine professing this claim may be treated.

[1] Mark iv. 3, &c.

It may be at once rejected. It may be admitted for a while into the heart, and be afterwards excluded by rival interests. It may be admitted and retained there, but exercise no active influence over the conduct; or it may be made the ruling principle of a man's sentiments, desires, pursuits, and actions.

Every modification of faith and of unbelief falls naturally into one of these four classes; and all these classes have existed wherever the Gospel has been generally made known. They had not, however, existed at the time when the parable was uttered. The Jewish law was so different in its nature, and so differently taught, that it produced none of those marked effects which have always attended the promulgation of the Gospel. So that the characters which should hereafter appear, existed only in the mind of the Author of the religion under which they were to spring: as the forms and lineaments of the future world are supposed by the philosopher to have been present in the mind of its divine Architect, though the lapse of time was required to unfold and exhibit them. The parable, when first pronounced, was as truly prophetic as the declaration which foretold the destruction of Jerusalem.

The manner in which these various characters are sketched is peculiarly remarkable. It is an outline of few strokes, displaying an intimate acquaintance with the features to be described.

Wherever the Gospel is taught as a divine revelation, many "hear it, and understand it not." Its declarations lie on the surface of the mind; but no pains are taken to examine the evidence of its authority, nor to bring the heart into subjection to its precepts. In truth, the heart is never affected: the man remains within the hearing but without the feeling of religion. Such is the case with seed which falls "by the way side;" on ground unprepared and unfit to receive it; where it is trodden under foot by every passenger, or carried off by the fowls of the air: destroyed by the scorner, or scattered by the tempter.

Others, instead of neglecting the Gospel altogether, are struck with some sense of its beauty: with the high views of mankind and their future destiny which it unfolds; or the ennobling relation to God, which it offers; or the suitableness of its doctrines to the condition of the human race. So when they "hear the word, they receive it with joy;" listen to it gladly; and if there were no trials to come, no self-denial to be exercised, no duties to be performed, they would be something more than *almost* Christians. So corn might flourish on a rock, if there were no sun to parch it, or no storm to wash it away; it springs up for a time, though afterwards it withers. Such is the religious impression described in the figure. When difficulties arise, it is obliterated. The corrupt propensities of the heart prevail: or

opposition ensues; if not such as menaced the early followers of Jesus, the never-failing opposition of the indifference, contempt, and irreligious example of other men; and under these trials, religion gives way, if it has not been deeply rooted in the heart. "He that receiveth the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by-and-by he is offended." [1]

There is also a numerous class who persevere through life with no doubt upon their minds of the truth of Christianity: they pay some attention to its ordinances, and imagine, perhaps, that in the main they are living obediently to its precepts. And so they do live, in all those cases where the world and the Scripture agree: in all the ordinary rules of life which keep society together, and secure the peace of the community. But the heart is still untouched, or, at best, unsubdued: it is fixed on worldly advantages, worldly preferment, worldly pleasures, worldly approbation; and these snares so entangle it, that all those rarer and peculiar graces which the Gospel requires—all that undivided attachment to its Author which it claims—all that uncompromising fidelity which constitutes and distinguishes the true Chris-

[1] Matt. xiii. 21.

tian, is still wanting. Such is he who "receives seed among thorns; and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful." He is not like those who have never paid any attention to the word; nor like those who, having been drawn to listen to it, have afterwards avowedly discarded it, as requiring too great a sacrifice. He remains to the end a plant upon Christian ground: has leaves and blossoms: a show, perhaps, of fruit, of fruit which reaches no perfection: it is not *Christian* fruit, such as belongs peculiarly to the Gospel, being estimated by its standard, and supported by its motives.

So likewise there is a fourth class, upon whom the word is not lost or destroyed without taking root; neither is it overborne by the opposition which it must encounter; neither is it choked among the concerns, and interests, and pleasures of the present state; but it grows among unfriendly plants, and flourishes in spite of an ungenial climate; and is distinguished by the fruits of humility, piety, holiness, and charity, in which it abounds. Yet among these who alike "receive, and understand, and keep the word," there is not an uniform proficiency. All do not in an equal degree obtain the mastery over their natural corruptions. All do not arrive at an equal height in Christian virtues. All do not labour equally in the service of their Master, to whom they have attached themselves. All produce fruit;

but "some thirty fold, some sixty, and some an hundred."

Such is the actual state of the Christian world. And such is the description which was drawn of it before Christianity was in existence. The description agrees with the experience of every minister who has observed the workings of human nature under the operation of the Gospel. He can distinguish characters like these among every hundred persons that may be under his charge; he can perceive none who do not fall naturally and easily within some of these classes. And this ought to be considered strong evidence of divine authority in him who delivered such a parable: a parable which comprehensively describes the whole of mankind, in a country where the Gospel is preached: so as to mark out by a masterly touch the different shades and variations of character, which should be hereafter produced by a cause not then in operation. That this foreknowledge of character should have been found in men who were no more than Jesus and his followers appeared to be, is as difficult to believe, as that one uneducated in anatomy should be able to delineate the internal conformation of the human body.

IV. It must be observed, farther, that the parable just considered by no means stands alone, an exception to the general tenour of the discourse of Jesus:

it cannot be alleged as a single instance of success among many failures. The truth which it conveys is intimated by several other parables, likewise of a prophetic nature; among which that of the tares springing up among the wheat, and of the net cast into the sea,[1] deserve particular attention. Like the former, they communicate information which an impostor would be unwilling to furnish, which an enthusiast would refuse to anticipate, but which has been found agreeable to experience in every age of the Gospel. They predict, that even in the countries where Christianity is received and generally professed, there shall be a great variance between its precepts and the characters of many who come within its pale. They warrant us to expect that many will contradict by their lives the faith which they express in their creed, and fall short of the character which the Gospel prescribes and requires.

That such is the case, none will deny. A large proportion of the people, in a Christian country, believe in the incarnation of Jesus as an historical fact, without being in any characteristic degree influenced by his religion. I do not only mean that they are denominated Christians from their geographical position, or the baptism of their infancy; but that, if questioned upon the point, they would profess themselves Christians; would be offended if their faith were doubted; would desire to be comprehended in

[1] Matt. xiii. 24, 43, 47, 50.

all the benefits of Christianity, and resent it, if their title to them were denied. And yet, if their lives were examined, and their sentiments tried according to the rules and spirit of Christianity, they would be found altogether defective. It would appear that there is a religion according to Scripture, and a religion according to the world: and that these are contrary one to the other, both in regard to faith and practice.

No doubt, this discrepancy between the general habits and sentiments of those who profess Christianity, and the precepts of their religion, is a melancholy fact; and one with regard to which we require all the light of Scripture to explain the results of our experience, and all the results of our experience to confirm the predictions of Scripture. An argument has been raised against the religion itself, that so much should have been undertaken, and yet so much still unaccomplished. And certainly before the experiment had been tried, that which has proved the actual result would hardly have been foreseen. We should have anticipated, perhaps, that many should avow themselves completely independent of any Revelation. But should we have expected that numbers, who confess its authority, and believe its divine obligation, would despise its sanctions, and neglect its demands, and disregard its instructions?

These parables, however, assure us, that in all this

inconsistency between profession and practice, between precept and obedience, there is nothing more than was foreseen: foreseen as about to result from the arts of the spiritual enemy of mankind, acting upon human corruption. The dispensation of the Gospel, we are told, or the religion of Jesus, is like a field sown with corn; among which weeds spring up and grow together with the corn: or like a table furnished with guests of every kind, both bad and good: or like a net which is cast into the sea, and gathers of every kind. This plainly intimates, that among those who, in a country where Christianity is established, profess and call themselves Christians, all shall not be of that kind which the Gospel is intended to produce. There shall be persons of every kind. It is no more supposed that all shall live up to the Gospel, or make it their rule of opinion and standard of duty, than it is supposed by the husbandman that no weeds shall appear among his corn; or by one who casts his net into the sea and gathers all within his reach, that all he takes shall be worth preserving.

And this entirely agrees with what has been actually observed in every country where Christianity has been the national religion. It gathers of every kind: it contains a mixture of wheat and tares, which both grow up together until the harvest, till the final distinction is made between the barren

professors of Christianity, and those who are fitted for the mansions of the heavenly husbandmen.

These aberrations from the spirit of the Gospel, where they exist, will be open and evident. Others may be more easily concealed from human observation. Provision is made against these also. The parable of the guest who appeared at the feast "not having a wedding garment,"[1] is intended to reach the case of one who, to outward appearance, is sound in the Christian faith. For he accepts the invitation, which others refuse; and he takes his place among the guests. But he has neglected that holiness which is essential to the true Christian. The practical Antinomian is perhaps a rare character; yet, doubtless, it exists; and ecclesiastical history acquaints us that some have been found in almost every age, who have systematically defended this inconsistent heresy. So there are many moral disorders incompatible with the Gospel, as pride, hypocrisy, unsanctified temper, uncharitableness, covetousness, which may remain in a great measure undiscovered, or at least, unsubdued, to the end. We cannot but admire the prophetic correction which such vices receive in this parable. With the same tendency as those before considered, it proceeds further; and shows its Author's foreknowledge of a truth, which we are reluctantly obliged to own

[1] Matt. xxii. 11—1.

is possible, that a man may deceive all by whom he is surrounded, and find his error only discovered at last to the Searcher of hearts.

V. But insight into the human heart is not the only excellence of these parables. It was an original mode of conveying instruction: for the few parables which previously existed admit of no comparison with the copiousness, variety, and force of those attributed to Jesus. It was a mode of conveying instruction peculiarly suitable to the object proposed. Allegories, it is generally acknowledged, strike the mind more forcibly, and are more subtle and delicate in their operation, than direct precepts. And the parables of the Gospel have every property which can fit them for the purpose which they were intended to serve. They are obvious and familiar, otherwise their moral would have been inaccessible to the understanding of those who must always of necessity form the most numerous class of hearers. Yet have they nothing that is low or mean, or unworthy of the source from which they profess to be derived. They can neither be uninteresting to the most learned reader, nor offend the most fastidious. Experience has proved the wisdom which dictated them. They have been commented upon during as many ages as Christianity has existed. Yet, from the abundance of illustration which they admit, every succeeding commentator finds in them the basis of

some new argument, by which he may enforce the examination of the heart, and prepare it for the influence of religion. Can it be supposed that all these excellencies, directed to the same object and promoting the same end, could have resulted from an unauthorized imposture?

Impostors, moreover, must have been aware of the embarrassment necessarily arising from writings containing so much variety. Discourses, asserting generally the immortality of the soul or a future judgment, or conveying moral rules and religious exhortations, might have been framed with comparatively little hazard of detection or contradiction. But the Gospels, in the mixture of narrative, dialogue, and allegorical language which they contain, betray an adventurous spirit, a boldness of enterprise, which must certainly have led impostors to their own refutation. Yet these writings have been vigilantly scrutinized and closely examined, both by friends and enemies, during eighteen centuries; and the experience of eighteen centuries has confirmed their authority, by bringing to light continually successive proofs of the knowledge of human nature which they display, and the influence over it which they pre-eminently exercise, under all circumstances of time and climate, and all varieties of character and education.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE WISDOM MANIFESTED IN THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES.

In the preceding chapter I have pointed to some proofs which seem to indicate more than human foreknowledge in the authors of the Christian Scriptures. But the proof of wisdom may be negative as well as positive. And it seems incredible that such writers as those of the New Testament must have been, if their works were the coinage of their own minds, should not have committed themselves by absurdities, and betrayed their cause by contradictions. This has been done by all others who have ventured to set out on similar pretensions. But the Gospels have risen in esteem, in proportion as they have been longer the subject of examination, meditation, and commentary. Learning has not found them too simple, nor simplicity too learned. Those who have studied them longest, still derive fresh interest from the perusal.

Yet the New Testament is concerned with subjects,

which, if its authors had been destitute of guidance, would have been likely to betray them into inconsistencies. Human liberty, and divine prescience; the beings of another world; the rewards and punishments of a future state; these are subjects of such depth and height, and at the same time so seductive to the imagination, that faculties apparently most competent to such a task, most prepared for it by nature and education, failed in their attempt to reach them.

We have no right to expect in the Christian writers a degree of discretion and good sense which is not found in Socrates or Plato. But how full of absurdity are the descriptions which these latter gave of the future state of the soul, the moment they ventured to depart from generalities.[1]

Many of the apocryphal writings afford a similar test. Independently of the external testimony which excludes them from the canon, we at once reject them as unsatisfactory. Why? but because our standard is formed upon the authentic books of Scripture, and that standard is approved by our reason to be far

[1] In the Phædo, different places are assigned to different souls, according to their respective pursuits on earth. Those of philosophers soar to the dwellings of the gods: those of men who have been devoted to the concerns of the body, being too gross and heavy to mount upward, are pressed down towards their native earth, περι τα μνῆματα τε και τους ταφους κυλινδουμεναι· and at last are destined to animate inferior creatures, according to their peculiar bent: the sensual becoming asses; the rapacious, wolves; the busy (πολιτικοι), ants, wasps, or bees.—Phædo, S. 80, &c.

superior to the pretenders which rival it. Yet why should this be, if all are to be referred to a like origin?

Jesus Christ, as we cannot but observe, never undertakes to describe the nature of that future reward which he promised to his disciples. He speaks of it generally, under the terms of everlasting life, or glory, or the kingdom of heaven; but he attempts no luxuriant, or even particular description. On one occasion, where an inclination to lead him further was manifested; he merely replies, in forcible, though sober language, that "they who are counted worthy to attain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, shall neither marry, nor be given in marriage, but be as the angels of God in heaven."[1]

His Apostles follow this example, and maintain a similar reserve; speaking of a heavenly inheritance, of a crown of glory, of life and immortality: but discreetly affirming, in words with which the Jews were acquainted, that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."[2]

St. Paul even speaks of glorious visions revealed to him, and of a glimpse which he was permitted to enjoy of the heavenly world. He had here entered upon a field, in which an enthusiast would have delighted to expatiate. Yet all we are told is, that he

[1] Matt. xxii. 30. [2] 1 Cor. ii. 9, from Isaiah lxiv. 4.

heard "things which it is not lawful for man to utter."[1]

All this exactly satisfies our reason. We can perfectly understand, that persons in one state of being can never be made to comprehend with any clearness the circumstances of another and a very different state of being; and that any attempt to describe them must inevitably fail.[2]

Compare, however, this reserve with the conduct of Mohammed, when he professes to draw out a minute description of the rewards to be expected by "the faithful."

"Therein are rivers of incorruptible water, and rivers of milk; the taste thereof cloyeth not; and rivers of wine, pleasant unto those that drink; and rivers of clarified honey; and therein shall they have plenty of clarified honey, and pardon from the Lord."[3]

"These are they who shall approach near unto God. They shall dwell in gardens of delight. Youths, which shall continue in their bloom for ever, shall go round about to attend them, with goblets and beakers, and a cup of flowing wine: their heads shall not ache by drinking the same, neither shall their reason be disturbed; they shall be fed with fruits of the roots which they shall choose, and the flesh of birds of the

[1] 2 Cor. xii. 2—4.

[2] The difference between the inspired and uninspired writer is evident from the puerility of Irenæus, l. 5, ch. 33, where he falls into the very error here alluded to.

[3] Koran, ch. xlvii.

kind which they shall desire. And there shall accompany them fair damsels, having eyes resembling pearls hidden in their shells, as a reward for that which they have wrought." [1]

"Verily the righteous shall dwell among delights; seated on cushions, they shall behold objects of pleasure; thou shalt see in their faces the brightness of joy. They shall be given to drink of pure wine, sealed, the seal whereof shall be musk; and to this let those aspire who aspire to happiness; and the water mixed therewith shall be of Tasnim, [2] a fountain whereof those shall drink who approach near unto the divine presence. They who act wickedly, laugh the true believers to scorn; wherefore, one day the true believers, in their turn, shall laugh the infidels to scorn; lying on couches, they shall look down upon them in hell." [3]

[1] Koran, ch. lvi. p. 434. Sale's edit.

[2] The name of a fountain in paradise, so called from its being conveyed to the highest apartments.

[3] Chap. lxxxiii. Sale, in his Preliminary Discourse, affirms that Mohammed took the greatest part of his paradise from Jewish traditions, with some assistance from the Persian Magi. As far as this is correct, it proves, in a remarkable degree, the difference between human and divine authority. A Jew, surrounded by these traditions, rejects them all. Sale is struck by the distinction. "Our Saviour (he says) speaks of the future state of the blessed as of a kingdom, where they shall eat and drink at his table, Luke xxii. 29. But then these descriptions have none of those puerile imaginations which reign throughout that of Mohammed, much less any the most distant intimation of sensual delights which he was so fond of; on the contrary, we are expressly assured, that in the resurrection they will neither marry nor be given in marriage, but will be as the angels of God in

It is not extraordinary that we should find these absurdities in a human composition. It would be more extraordinary if we did not; but it remains to be explained, why the discourses of Jesus exhibit no similar traces of a mind bewildering itself among things of which it had no experience, and representing as heavenly truths the dreams of an earthly imagination.

With regard to the punishments of another world, we find the same discreet reserve in the Christian Scriptures. The most awful retribution is declared; and the fears of unbelieving man are excited by allusions to all those miseries which we here most shudder at; but hell is not described. We are told of "the fire that never shall be quenched; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched;" of "outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth;" of "the everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels;"[1] of "the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, whence the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night."[2] But the subject

heaven. Mohammed, however, to enhance the value of paradise with his Arabians, chose rather to imitate the indecency of the Magians, than the modesty of the Christians, in this particular."—Sale's Prelim. Disc. p. 101. See Koran, ch. lv.; to quote which would greatly corroborate my argument, if I were not unwilling to disgust the reader.

[1] Mark ix. 44. Matt. viii. 12. Matt. xxv. 41.

[2] Rev. xiv. 11.

is left in these obscure generalities; and the Apostles, instead of enlarging, as a natural temptation might have led them to do, upon the texts thus left them by their Master, confine themselves to the most modest and prudent statements upon this tremendous theme. They denounce, as was their commission, the "terrors of the Lord," "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil;" but they wrap up these terrors and this anguish in the general expressions of the forfeiture of the heavenly inheritance, "the blackness of darkness for ever," and "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord." In short, instead of yielding to imagination, and giving way to the allurements of ambitious descriptions, either of future punishment or future reward, they rather surprise us by their reserve.

Not so Mohammed. He has, "in his Koran and traditions, been very exact in describing the various torments of hell, which, according to him, the wicked will suffer, both from intense heat and excessive cold."[1]

"Unto those who treasure up gold and silver, and employ it not for the advancement of God's true religion, denounce a grievous punishment. On the day of judgment their treasures shall be intensely heated in the fire of hell, and their foreheads, and

[1] Sale's Prelim. Disc. 92.

their sides, and their backs shall be stigmatized therewith; and their tormentors shall say, This is what ye have treasured up for your souls; taste, therefore, that which ye have treasured up."[1]

"Those who believe not, shall have garments of fire fitted to them; boiling water shall be poured on their heads; their bowels shall be dissolved thereby, and also their skins; and they shall be beaten with maces of iron. So often as they shall endeavour to get out of hell, because of the anguish of their torments, they shall be dragged back into the same; and their tormentors shall say unto them, Taste ye the pain of burning."[2] "Woe be, on that day, unto those who accused the prophets of imposture! It shall be said unto them, Go ye into the punishment which ye denied as a falsehood: go ye into the shadow of the smoke of hell, which shall arise in three columns, and shall not shade you from the heat, neither shall it be of service against the flame; but it shall cast forth sparks as big as towers, resembling yellow camels in colour."[3]

This is a specimen, and only a short specimen,

[1] Koran, ch. ix. p. 153. [2] Koran, ch. xxii. p. 276.

[3] Koran, ch. lxxviii. p. 478. I have made these quotations the more freely, because I believe few persons, comparatively, know what the Koran really contains. They understand that it is a successful imposture, which, like Christianity, has covered a wide surface of the earth; and this operates to injure Christianity, by familiarizing us to an idea of successful imposture. But if the original records were consulted, if Mohammed were read instead of Gibbon, the imposture would become a powerful auxiliary to the truth.

compared with the numerous passages to the same effect, which occur in the Koran, of the manner in which the imagination is likely to wanton and riot, when it enters upon the mysterious field of future reward and punishment. The Christian writers themselves of the second and third century often afford us a similar example, and appal us by the minuteness with which they delineate the undescribable transactions of the day of judgment, and its awful consequences.[1] Scripture alone is temperate; —intelligible, as far as its religious effects require that the subject should be explained: yet neither alluring the fancy by luxuriant images, nor disgusting it by terrific descriptions. Yet, apart from his divinity, there seems no reason why Jesus and his followers should have differed from those whose inferiority to him every reader must acknowledge. The subject is a favourite with the vulgar; and he addressed his instructions to the poor. The Eastern writers delight in allegory, and figures, and highly-coloured representations. And he was an Oriental teacher. Even Mohammed's descriptions are, in many instances, traced to Jewish origin: and Jesus was brought up in the midst of those ideas and fables which the Jews had engrafted upon their authentic Scriptures. So that if we persist in supposing that all set out under

[1] See, in particular. Tertull. de Spectaculis, c. 30. Lactant. Instit. vii. 21.

the same circumstances, no rational account can be given why he should be free from the errors which we immediately detect in others.[1]

2. Another subject of great delicacy and difficulty which meets us at the entrance of religion, is the degree of human liberty, and its compatibility with divine foreknowledge and government. Our reason tells us that we must be free, "else how shall God judge the world?" Yet our reason assures us likewise, that the governor of the world could not maintain his supremacy, if the agency of man were subject to no restraint, or bounded by no limits. Again, we are conscious of freedom, conscious that we do of our own voluntary determination choose or refuse the

[1] Dr. Hey has made a similar observation respecting the *character* and the *miracles* of Jesus. He speaks of the danger of detection when any one undertakes to draw a character of a superior; and the greater the superiority, the greater the difficulty. "The absurdities," he adds, "into which a *fictitious* narrative would run, would be greater still, if the character feigned was something more than human: here the author's taste for prodigies would display itself: his deity would be sure to do nothing that a mere man could do, nothing that would be dictated by plain common sense." With respect to miracles, he observes; "It seems undeniable, that if the Evangelists had invented the account of the miracles they related, those miracles would have been as idle and foolish as those related by some of the ancient fathers; for the fathers had many of them much better education than the Evangelists. Inventing miracles is treading on dangerous ground; I know no one, who would not, in such an attempt, even with the greatest improvements the world has ever had, run into absurd pomp and ostentation, something remote from human nature and common sense."—Lectures, B. I. ch. xiii. sect. x.

evil or the good; while, at the same time, our experience convinces us of the necessity of some preventing, co-operating, and assisting influence, both to convert the soul, and to keep it within the course prescribed.

These conflicting principles have embarrassed, in all ages, both those who studied natural religion, and those who believed revelation. The wisest of these have been satisfied with concluding, that there is some mode in which the prescience and sovereignty of God can be reconciled with human liberty, though we may be unable to perceive and trace it. This, I think, is the ground on which those reasoners, who are best capable of discoursing on such a subject, commonly take their stand; for, although we find many who profess what are usually termed Calvinistic doctrines, they are but few who actually and deliberately maintain, on the one hand, that election is absolute and grace irresistible; or, on the other, that any man is morally incapable of believing.

I would not wish to assume a disputed point, when I proceed to allege that the Christian Scriptures coincide with this moderate and reasonable conclusion; but surely we are warranted in deducing such a result from the acknowledged fact, that both the advocates for necessity, and the advocates for human liberty, appeal to these Christian Scriptures for support to their opposite opinions. Now, this is exactly what might be looked for, if our understand-

ing and experience have really conducted us to the right conclusion; that is, if God does exert an influence over the human heart, and yet such influence is not inconsistent with human liberty. In that case, we should find certain passages addressing mankind, as if they were solely concerned in determining their own character: we should find other passages implying that the preparation and direction of the heart is from above. Why need the exact degree be defined, in which divine influence or human nature operates? Probably it would not be possible to explain it; certainly it would not be necessary. The purpose would be best answered by leaving it indefinite. Man knows enough to make him humble, if he knows that of himself he can do nothing; and enough to make him diligent, if he is admonished to "watch," and "keep himself," and "work out his salvation."

Mohammed, on the contrary, has split upon this rock also. "The sixth great point of fate which the Mohammedans are taught by the Koran to believe, is God's absolute decree and predestination, both of good and evil. For the orthodox doctrine is, that whatever hath or shall come to pass in this world, whether it be good or whether it be bad, proceedeth entirely from the divine will, and is irrevocably fixed and recorded from all eternity in the *preserved table:* God having secretly predetermined not only the adverse and prosperous fortune of every person

in this world in the most minute particulars, but also his faith or infidelity; his obedience or disobedience, and, consequently, his everlasting happiness after death; which fate or predestination it is not possible by any foresight or wisdom to avoid." [1]

This affords a remarkable contrast to the moderation and reserve of the Christian writings on this intricate subject. While Jesus gives us clearly to understand that faith in himself as Saviour of the world, and the life resulting from it, depend upon heavenly influence, he never allows us to suppose that this influence is arbitrarily bestowed: he distinctly affirms that it is refused to none; that none are excluded from it; that every one who asks receives, and every one who seeks shall find.

How different is this from the language of the Koran: "As for unbelievers, it will be equal to them whether thou admonish them or do not admonish them; they will not believe; God has sealed up their hearts and their hearing; a dimness covereth their sight, and they shall suffer a grievous punishment." [2] Compare this with the command given to the Apostles, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature;" or with the invitation which they were empowered to issue, "Come unto me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I

[1] Sale's Prelim. Discourse, p. 101.
[2] Chap. ii. p. 2.

will give you rest;" and then decide which carries internal evidence of its orign. Conceive, for a moment, the difference it would create in our feelings and our sentiments, if such a sentence as this had fallen from the lips of Jesus: "The fate of every man is bound about his neck."[1] And yet why should it not have escaped him? if he had been a mere adventurer in religion; why should he not have been bewildered in the labyrinth in which so many have most unprofitably strayed?

3. Another mark of superiority in the Christian Scriptures, is the confidence with which Jesus affirms the facts which he undertook to reveal, such as the resurrection, an eternal state, the way of salvation, the divine counsels; without labouring to prove them. Mohammed is constantly employed in argument and discussion: but no instances of these are found in the Gospels, except for the purpose of convincing the Jews out of their own Scriptures: which is very different from a formal endeavour to prove the possibility of a fact, or the reasonableness of a doctrine. St. Paul was concerned with some opponents, who denied the resurrection of the body; and he takes pains to confute them by an argument from analogy. Mohammed also is not contented with merely assert-

[1] Koran, ch. xvii. p. 229. "Like a collar which he cannot by any means get off."—Sale *in loco*.

ing the resurrection: he uses the same argument as St. Paul, and adds another to show, what is very true, that the second birth is no greater miracle than the first. This is all as might be expected, that men should argue with men. But Jesus merely declares the fact: "The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."[1] And so with respect to whatever he affirms.

When we consider the original and unexpected doctrines which Jesus introduced; the novel idea of his sacrifice, which nevertheless is capable of so much illustration from the Hebrew Scriptures; the clearer view of the personality and office of the Holy Spirit, which also might admit of so much confirmation from the books of Moses and the prophets; the novelty of some of his precepts, which might appear at first sight paradoxical or impracticable: it must strike us as singular, that he merely delivered his oracular message, and resisted all temptation to show its justice or its probability. He declared, that out of the heart of man proceed all the crimes which pollute the world;[2] but left it to his disciples to explain from whence the heart derived its depravity. He declared that he was come "to give his life a ransom

[1] John v. 28. [2] Matt. xv. 19.

for many;"[1] but left it to his disciples to show why this was needful, and how it had made a part of the divine counsels from the beginning. He enjoined his followers not to resist evil, and promised that the meek should inherit the earth; but left it for experience, to prove that such precepts are compatible with the daily concerns and intercourse of mankind. We see at once the propriety of this conduct, if Jesus were indeed a "teacher come from God;"[2] but can we believe that one who had assumed a title to which he had no just claim would have acted with such consistency? Especially when in that case the only reasonable chance of success must have been his proving the excellence of his precepts, and convincing his countrymen of the truth of his doctrines by arguments which they could not but acknowledge.

4. The foregoing points are of a speculative nature. In others, which relate more immediately to practice, the superior wisdom of the author of Christianity is no less conspicuous. In cases of considerable delicacy, he manifests an intimate knowledge of the

[1] Matt. xx. 28.

[2] "We may suppose that one sent from God to reform and instruct the world will have recourse to some plain and satisfactory way of establishing his authority, which must be by working miracles, or by fulfilling ancient prophecies, or by foretelling future events; and that when he has thus prepared men to obey him and trust in him, he will command as a lawgiver, rather than reason as a philosopher." —Jortin, Disc. p. 78.

heart, and of the way in which it is affected by religious exercises.

The Mohammedan religion, like other superstitions prevailing in the East, is rigorous in prescribing prayers, fasts, and specific acts of mortification. Mohammed required his followers to offer five prayers in the twenty-four hours, at certain stated times. He also prescribed with minute exactness the fasts which they should observe. Alms he treated as a religious tax: a certain per centage being levied on each man's property, and this differing according to the nature of the possession. "For, of what is gotten out of the mines, or the sea, or by any art or profession, over and above what is sufficient for the reasonable support of a man's family, and especially where there is a mixture or suspicion of unjust gain, a fifth part ought to be given in alms."[1]

And this is an error into which a moral legislator would be very likely to fall. He has to deal with fickle and perverse beings, and might consider it wise to appoint the specific duty; to fix the definite degrees of austerity; the requisite proportion of charity; the exact hours of prayer.

Experience, however, has proved the wisdom of leaving these things more free and general, as they are left by the Christian Scriptures; which prescribe

[1] Sale's Koran, Prelim. Dissert.

the duty, but intrust the mode of its fulfilment to expediency and conscience. The way in which the Mohammedan fasts are appointed leads directly to the error which in fact prevails among Mohammedans. Their abstinence is not practised as a mean towards a higher end, but the merit is supposed to lie in the abstinence itself. The same of charity; the same of prayer; which are rather works to be performed than the results of a liberal and pious state of mind. And this is the danger attending all forms—a danger which is increased in proportion as the prescription is exact. Many of the Jews, we know, were devoutly attached to fasting as a form. Sale observes, that Mohammed followed their example, as in other customs, so in this. But Jesus condemned them in that very point where we perceive that the error lay. In the same manner as he commanded that men should set their affections on things above, and lay up treasure in heaven, without determining the exact degree of attention which should be paid to the present world and its concerns; in the same manner as he declared charity to be an indispensable duty, leaving the particular exercise of it to the discretion of its followers; so did he enjoin them to "keep the body under and bring it into subjection," while he ordained no precise observances for that purpose. The wisdom of this mode of legislation we sufficiently learn from the errors of the Mohammedans, who fast during

the month Ramadan with painful exactness, but lay no general restraint upon their appetites; and who adhere to strict austerity while the sun is up, and think that this warrants a proportionate indulgence at its setting. We learn it also from the subversion of all the essentials of Christianity, which the penances, fastings, austerities, and meritorious alms of the Romish church effected in the days of ignorance, and continue to produce where ignorance continues to prevail; and which, if they had been sanctioned instead of discouraged by the Gospel, would have afforded no slight argument against its divine authority.[1]

Here, then, a further instance presents itself, and that in a case of equal nicety and importance, in which Jesus displayed that wisdom by anticipation of which experience enables us to form a practical estimate, and avoided the mistakes in which others have fallen, who undertook a design like his. And the evidence arising out of this has the more value, because there is nothing to be brought into the opposite scale. There is no alloy to be set against

[1] It is a circumstance which deserves to be remarked, that the principal corruptions which have marred the effect of the Gospel have been introduced, not only without its sanction, but in spite of its express prohibition. The infallibility, supremacy, and temporal dominion of the Roman Pontiff are in direct opposition to Matt. xxiii. 8—10; and xx. 25—27. Compulsory celibacy, austerities, prescribed abstinence, and the worship of saints or angels are forbidden, in the clearest terms, by St. Paul. See Colos. ii. 16—23; and 1 Tim. iv. 1—8.

the pure gold. Those who have examined the Gospels with the most unfriendly eye, have sought to no purpose for a blemish. Those who have been very far from yielding themselves up to the influence of the religion, have been unable to withhold their admiration from the solemnity, simplicity, and consistency of the discourses of Jesus. Let them but advance one step further, and satisfy themselves on what principle this can possibly be explained, if Jesus had no other advantages than would have belonged to him as a native of Galilee, educated in Judea.

CHAPTER VIII.

ORIGINALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER.

It is the object of the Christian Scriptures, not merely to declare certain truths or doctrines, but to recommend and form a particular character; to which those who taught the religion stood pledged themselves; and which they held forth to the imitation of all who might become their disciples, as indispensable to their receiving its benefits.

Now this character is evidently an important test of the truth of the religion. Does it agree with the natural bias of the human mind? If so, we need seek no farther for its origin. Was it copied from any pattern already in existence? If so, it carries no proof of divinity. Is it unsuitable to the object which it was professedly intended to promote? If so, we have a strong argument against its authority. On the other hand, if it is such a character as had no existing original, when it was first proposed in the Gospel; such a character as men are naturally inclined to hold in low esteem, yet which is admirably

suited to the end for which it was designed; then fresh probability will be added to the arguments in favour of the religion.

The Christian character, however, was necessarily in many respects original when the Gospel was promulgated, because it has a remarkable connexion with the facts declared in the Gospel. It grows, as it were, out of them; like the branches from a tree. Deny them, and it has no propriety. The whole character is most natural and suitable, allowing the truth of the religion; but on any other ground, unintelligible.

Christianity is not proved to be a divine revelation, because it inculcates justice, humanity, sobriety; and forbids the contrary vices. Sufficient light has existed wherever mankind have attained a moderate degree of civilization, to recommend, if not to enforce, the leading duties of morality, and to show their connexion with the welfare of society. The personal virtues, indeed, have commonly fallen to the ground; and perverted reason has been at no loss for arguments to justify their violation. And it follows of course, that when the relation of man to his Creator is understood imperfectly, or not at all, the duties which spring out of that relation are neglected or unknown.[1] But this was not the case in Jerusalem.

[1] A lamentable, and at the same time an unanswerable, proof of the state of the heathen world, with regard to God, may be collected from Cicero. In his book De Officiis, which he wrote not only as a philo-

Both these classes of duty were distinctly laid down and inculcated in the Jewish Scriptures. So that what was absolutely wanting in the world at the Christian era, that is to say, what could nowhere be found previously existing in the world, was rather such sanctions as should render it worth while for men to practise inconvenient duties and cultivate virtues to which they are naturally disinclined, than a new code of those duties and virtues.

Supposing, however, that to be revealed which was only obscurely hinted in the Jewish law, but which Christianity professes to disclose, respecting the corruption of man's nature, and the light in which God views that corruption, respecting also the remedy which he has provided and the atonement which he has accepted for it; we must have expected that new duties should depend upon these truths, now for the first time made clearly known; and that a new turn should be given to many of those virtues which the best faculties of the best men had always seen to be agreeable to reason.

And so it is. Jesus and his followers require that a character should be cultivated, which, before his religion, had no existing prototype; which in some points, and particularly as to its motives and princi-

sopher, but as a father anxious for the welfare of his son, he passes over, in one short sentence, what we justly consider the first and leading duty of mankind:—"Deos placatos pietas efficiet et sanctitas." Lib. ii. s. 3. Yet he was in possession of all the light of his own and former ages.

ples, was original even among the Jews; and which was altogether foreign from the habits and feelings of other nations.

I. We may consider, as a first example, the state of mind which appears in the epistles of St. Paul,—a state of mind arising out of the intimate conviction that eternal life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ, —the gift of God, not earned or merited, but freely bestowed. Accordingly he writes: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners: of whom I am chief."[1] "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ;"[2] "for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."[3] Again, "After that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."[4] What I observe in this, is not a mere ex-

[1] 1 Tim. i. 15.
[2] Gal. vi. 14.
[3] Phil. iii. 8, 9.
[4] Titus iii. 4—7.

pression of humility, or acknowledgment of unworthiness: but a total renunciation of personal claim, an entire reliance upon Jesus as the author of acceptance with God, and consequent salvation. The doctrine which demands this faith and reliance is explained elsewhere; when it is asserted that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God:" that "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." But the feeling which is exhibited in the passages just cited, in which Paul is laying open, without reserve, the ground of his own individual hopes, is not such as can be created by direct precept: it originates in facts which are declared in the Gospel, and can only proceed from an admission of those facts as true.

For how much was there in St. Paul, which, according to the usual current of man's sentiments, might have satisfied him with relying upon himself and his own exertions? What he had given up for the sake of Christianity is well known: it includes all which men commonly esteem most valuable:—the faith in which he had been educated; the fellowship of his friends; the good opinion of his countrymen. What he had suffered is no less notorious: contempt, persecution, imprisonment, chastisement; and his "more abundant labours" placed him at the head of all who were engaged in the Christian cause: for there was scarcely a country which he had not visited, or a city in which he had not planted or encouraged

a congregation of proselytes. Neither does he deny all this; but frankly avows that no one had surpassed him in what he had done and undergone for the sake of Christianity. But with all these services in his favour, he uniformly withdraws all claim of merit; he exemplifies his Master's meaning, "Ye, when ye have done all, say, We are unprofitable servants;"[1] and exhibits the disposition intended by the words, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Now, independently of this reliance upon Christ, which could not have been before inculcated, the humility and renunciation of desert which Paul avows, was no part of the general state of religious feeling existing in his age and country. What that general feeling was, is sufficiently manifested in the dialogues which Jesus is related to have held: for though I must not consider it as granted that those dialogues actually took place, yet we may reasonably assume that they represent the ordinary opinions of the day. Indeed, those opinions are clearly discovered by what Paul incidentally mentions as to the change which had taken place in his own views. "I might also have confidence in the flesh" (in myself; my own advantages and performances). "If any other man thinketh" (as others are wont to think) "that he hath whereof he may trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an

[1] Luke xvii. 10.

Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is of the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ."[1]

From this as well as many other passages of St. Paul's writings, we are able to collect what was the prevailing confidence among the Jews, and what had once been his own confidence: and are therefore entitled to ask, how came these unknown and unaccredited authorities to contradict the national sentiments, and beat down the edifice of human "works and deservings;" the last thing from which men are commonly disposed to recede?[2]

It may seem an unexpected course of argument, to adduce doctrines in proof of facts. But it is nevertheless true, that when the Apostles insist upon this self-abasement and humiliation as the groundwork of the Christian character, we have strong evidence of their being personally convinced that the death of Jesus was actually ordained as a ransom for men; a ransom required by sin. If they did not really

[1] Phil. iii. 4—7.

[2] "The sublimest philosophy that ever was, did never drive man out of himself for a remedy; did never teach man to deny himself, but to build up his house with the old ruins, to fetch stones and materials out of the wonted quarry. Humiliation, confusion, shame, to be vile in our own eyes, to be nothing within ourselves, to be willing to own the vengeance of God, to judge ourselves, to justify him that may condemn us, and be witnesses against ourselves, are virtues known only in the book of God."—Bishop Reynolds.

believe this, no reason appears why these new teachers should promulgate doctrines so unpopular and so difficult: should inculcate the strictest possible morality, and yet deny to men the gratification of self-complacency: should allow them no other satisfaction, either from the faith which they professed or the obedience which they performed, than that of evidencing their title to the benefits which Christ's death had procured. If the condition of the world were not such as the Incarnation of Christ supposes: if there is not that holiness in God, and that unworthiness in man, which sets one at a distance from the other; then there is no propriety in a confession of unprofitableness which sues for pardon, but dares not claim reward; which looks forward to eternal life, not as a recompense which is to be earned and deserved, but as a boon which is to be bestowed through the merits of the Redeemer. Take away the judicial purpose of the cross, take away its expiatory effect, and there remains no basis for such humility as the Christian professes. And therefore it is a natural consequence, that those who do not receive the doctrine of atonement, do not pretend to any such humility as the Gospel prescribes, and the Apostles exemplify. If, on the other hand, human sinfulness is so heinous in the sight of the Moral Governor of the world, that it required a sacrifice like that of Christ, and if every individual is either indebted to that sacrifice for reconciliation with God,

or still remains unreconciled to him: the humiliation inculcated in the Gospel becomes natural, nay, necessary. But unless there had been, on the part of the promulgators of the religion, an intimate conviction that Jesus did indeed "die for our sins, and rise again for our justification," it would neither have occurred to them to conceive such an humbling disposition of self-abasement, nor to require it of all who should embrace the religion.

Indeed, the reliance upon Jesus inculcated by his disciples, extends further still. He is represented as the author of salvation in a twofold sense: not only by the atonement which justifies, but by the spiritual aid which sanctifies the Christian. They were to look to him, as the author and finisher of their faith: his Spirit was to deliver them from "the dominion of sin, which was in their members;" and in order to their bearing the fruits of righteousness, they must "abide in him and he in them," by an union as close as that of a tree with its branches.

And this principle appears realized and embodied in the Christian writings. Paul writes, "I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was within me." "We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God."[1] "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God

[1] Cor. iii. 5.

which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."[1]

Now the natural impression of the human mind seems to be,—I can do all things. Nothing is wanting but my own purpose and resolution.[2] And although a contrary doctrine is implied in many parts of the Jewish Scriptures, the dialogues occurring in the Gospel history do not lead us to suppose that any doubt of personal power, or desire of spiritual assistance, was intimately felt. But a very different language is held where the Christian is describing his state of mind. "I can do all things, through Christ who strengtheneth me."[3] What he depends on is, a realization of the promise, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."[4] "Ye are in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."[5] Language like this, not introduced in elaborate argument, but incidentally conveying the feelings of the heart, can only be ascribed to personal conviction.

II. Another original principle arising out of the

[1] Phil. ii. 12, 13.

[2] As Horace, 1 Ep. xviii. 111.: Sed satis est orare Jovem, qui donat et aufert; Det vitam, det opes. *Æquum mi animum ipse parabo.* "There is one thing," says Seneca, "in which the wise man excels God: God is wise by the benefit of nature, and *not by his own choice.*" —Epist. 53. Monstro quod *ipse tibi possis dare.*—Juven. S. x.

[3] Phil. iv. 13. [4] 2 Cor. xii. 9. [5] 1 Cor. i. 30.

facts declared in the Gospel, appears in the grounds by which the Apostles enforce benevolence and universal charity. They enforce it from the disposition which the incarnation of Jesus had evinced; as introducing a new train of sentiments, and a corresponding course of action, in his disciples.

Spontaneous and disinterested benevolence is the inscription, written, as it were, on the face of the incarnation. We know little respecting the happiness of the Deity; but thus much we seem to know, that it cannot be capable of addition. Therefore, with the sole purpose of communicating some portion of that happiness to mankind, God sent his Son, and his Son agreed to bear our human nature and all its infirmities in his own person. It is impossible that this fact should not create a new feeling in the hearts of those who believe it. Did the Son of God, with no other object than my salvation, consent to forego heavenly enjoyments, and to suffer, in no common degree, the miseries of this world? From the moment when I believe this, a new principle is imparted to me. "If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."[1] And so it has proved from the beginning. The Gospel introduced a new era. It first bound all who embraced it, together. "They that believed had all things in common;" and "were of one heart and of one

[1] 1 John iv. 11.

soul." And this arose out of the religion itself. Its author had laid the foundation of it, by saying, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."[2] And then they went forth, united in this bond, to exercise the same love towards all their fellow-creatures. St. Paul thus explains the motive which actuates him: "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them."[3] And again, urging the disciples to prove the sincerity of their love, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."[4] Here the argument for Christian charity is taken from the disinterested and self-denying example of Christ himself, and not from the positive commands of his religion.

The object to which this benevolence was directed is no less remarkable. It was the soul rather than the body; the concerns of another world, and not the present. Jesus, indeed, is represented as having shown by his own practice, that while his leading purpose was to reclaim the hearts of men, he did

[1] Acts ii. 44. [2] John xiii. 34. [3] 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. [4] 2 Cor. viii. 9.

not overlook their temporal necessities, or reckon the wants and infirmities of the body of no importance. And when it fell in their way, his disciples followed the example. But the main purpose of their exertions was, to bring mankind to a new state of heart, and a new course of life, as preparatory to their future admission into a heavenly kingdom. The interest which is expressed upon this object is such as could only be excited by deep conviction.

"Ye know," says Paul to the elders of the Ephesian church, "how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God. And now I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God. Therefore, watch, and remember, that for the space of

three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears."[1] We see at large, in this passage, the spirit which constantly breathes throughout St. Paul's writings. Sensible of escape from imminent danger, he is only anxious to rescue others. Conscious of great personal blessings, he is eager to communicate them as widely as possible. "Seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not."[2] "We were willing to have imparted to you, not the Gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us."[3] "We live, if ye stand fast in the Lord."[4] "My heart's desire and prayer for Israel is, that they might be saved." "I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart; for I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kindred according to the flesh."[5]

Interest so vivid as this, in a case which had no concern with anything belonging to the present world, was altogether new. To go about the world, teaching religion, teaching it to all ranks, to the poor as earnestly as to the rich, had never entered into the thoughts of Jew or Gentile. Whatever instruction had been given by heathen philosophers, was given to those who were able to remunerate their teachers. To communicate the mysteries of religion to the vulgar and illiterate, to women and

[1] Acts xx. 19—31. [2] 2 Cor. iv. 1. [3] 1 Thes. ii. 8.
[4] 1 Thes. iii. 8. [5] Rom. x. 1; ix. 2.

children, would have been reckoned most preposterous. All conspired, on principle, to keep them in ignorance; and to make the characteristic of Christianity more remarkable, that "to the poor the Gospel was preached." It arose, indeed, naturally out of the facts of the religion, which declared the infinite value of every soul. And the conduct of the Apostles was the sure result of an actual conviction of what they affirmed, that "God had sent his Son, that all that believe in him might not perish." But experience shows that nothing short of an actual and personal conviction of this—a conviction far beyond a mere assent to it as an article of national faith or a matter of recorded history—will lead to the sort of anxiety and warm feeling about the state of others, which is indicated in the language quoted from St. Paul. Such a feeling ought to follow, wherever the authority of the doctrine is acknowledged. But it does not really follow, unless the doctrine is very cordially received.

III. Another constituent of the Christian character is equally original, and equally dependent upon the facts of the religion. That humility towards God, which is the basis of Christianity, extends also to the dealings and spirit of men towards each other, and leads in an unexampled degree to meekness, patience, and forgiveness of personal injuries. Reason, indeed, had convinced a few superior men, that

it was more magnanimous to forgive than to avenge. But it could not afford an adequate motive for the practice of such magnanimity; and in fact it had not been practised. Even amongst the Jews, in despite of the contrary precepts of their law, the maxims of retaliation prevailed. "It had been said by them of old time, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy."[1] To such an extent had that propensity to retaliation, which above all others seems to be born with man, gained the ascendancy over the commands of Moses. Jesus issued a new injunction: "I say unto you, That ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven."[2] And when we trace this spirit further, to the motives by which it is inculcated, we find it springing out of the doctrines on which the Gospel is founded. Man is corrupt and sinful, and God has shown a signal proof of forbearance towards men; therefore men ought to forgive one another. This is implied in the prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." It is positively required in the parable of the unforgiving servant, who is thus reproved: "O thou wicked ser-

[1] Matt. v. 38, 43. [2] Matt. v. 39, 44.

vant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?"[1] Again, Christ suffered the most unmerited injuries with patience; "when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." Therefore his followers ought not to complain, but "for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps."[2] Further, Christ was a living instance of meekness and humility and self-devotion: who, "being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Therefore, "let this mind be" in his disciples, "which was also in Christ Jesus. Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."[3]

Such are the principles of Christian meekness and

[1] Matt. xviii. 32, 33. [2] 1 Pet. ii. 19—23. [3] Phil. ii. 3—8.

forbearance. And it will be observed, that the principles are no less original than the virtues; and could never have been proposed, unless they had been witnessed in an existing pattern, and confirmed by divine authority. For who would have dared to set out on a mission like that of the Apostles,—a mission which exposed them to every species of ill-treatment and indignity,—with no stronger arms of defence than meekness and forbearance? To go, as they went, and induce others to go, with their eyes open, yet their hands bound, into the midst of enemies?

Now what I would insist on is, that all these peculiar features which distinguish the Christian character, are exactly such as we should look for in the case of the truth of the religion. Humility towards God must follow the fact of the redemption: philanthropy must be excited by the example of the incarnation; and must be directed towards the soul as well as the body; and the passive virtues of meekness and resignation grow out of the nature and condition of man revealed in the Gospel. This character, therefore, is perfectly consistent with the facts which the religion declares. Supposing these facts to be of divine authority, and to be received as such, there cannot be less sense of personal unworthiness, less concern for the spiritual welfare of others, less forbearance and humility than the Gospel prescribes, or the language of its followers expresses. So im-

portant a fact as the Incarnation could not take place, without introducing new duties, and new views of duty, wherever it was made known. But unless these facts had been divinely revealed; unless Jesus had not only been a teacher, but "a teacher sent from God," unless he had not only died, but died as a sacrifice for sin, these qualities of self-abasement, and patience, and zeal in the cause of religion, lose much of their propriety, as well as their strongest enforcement; and it becomes in the highest degree improbable, that the fabricators of a new religion should have recommended and prescribed them.

When, at the present day, I see a person contented to abandon his private comforts and enjoyments, and occupy his life in making the Scriptures known, in teaching the ignorant, and reclaiming the vicious; when he appears to find a sufficient recompense for this labour, if even a very small flock are brought over to Christian faith and practice, I am sure that he must himself believe the condition of these persons to be dangerous, and that they actually need his interposition. If I were to observe further, that he submitted with patience to insult and injury, and was only stimulated by resistance and opposition to more unceasing efforts for the conversion of his adversaries, I should feel assured that he must be actuated by some powerful and uncommon principle, which thus enabled him to overcome the dispositions which are natural to the human mind. And when I

hear one who has been habitually watching over his thoughts and words and actions, and labouring to regulate them according to what he takes to be the will of God, speak of himself in a strain like this: "I sin, and repent of my sins, and sin in my repentance :—I pray for forgiveness, and sin in my prayers :—I resolve against future sin, and sin in forming my resolutions ;—so that I may say, my whole life is almost a continued course of sin :"[1]—language like this assures me that such an one is judging himself according to a law of unusual strictness, and can have derived his idea of the purity required of him from no other source than the Christian Scriptures.

By a like process of argument, when I find a character of this description in the Apostles themselves, and when I find them inculcating this as the character which is to be cherished in others, I am forcibly led to conclude that they personally believed the facts on which such a character is founded, and did not invent them to serve a purpose of their own. I feel sure that nothing but an intimate conviction that the matters which they taught were true, could have produced a state of mind, or actuated a course of life, like theirs.

IV. The virtues, then, which are encouraged, I might say, created by the Gospel, are, in many

[1] Bishop Beveridge.

instances, peculiar. But it still remains to be considered, whether these virtues agree with the purpose which they are professedly designed to serve; the preparing those who cultivate them for another and a higher state of being. This, however, cannot be denied. They have been sometimes accused of unfitting men for earth; but there can be no doubt of their suitableness to the most reasonable ideas we can form of heaven. Humility is surely the feeling with which a creature like man ought to approach his Creator. Benevolence is the disposition of mind which belongs to a kingdom where all will be love and harmony: and in which there can be no place for malice, hatred, or revenge. And, therefore, humility and meekness and brotherly love must be essential features of the character which shall be hereafter received into the presence of God, unless such a new creation of soul were expected as is totally inconsistent with the idea of retribution, and would render the present life in a less degree subservient or preparatory to another, than the principle of metempsychosis.

It may be inquired, further, are these qualifications, which are expected in Christians, such as are calculated to promote the well-being and increase the happiness of mankind in their present state? Without subscribing to the opinion of the modern rationalists, who contend that men are at liberty to prescribe what God shall reveal to them, or what

the immediate effect of a religion ought to be, which professes to look towards and lead to a state very different from this: still it must be allowed to make in favour of the religion, if it assists human happiness. Especially as its avowed object is, to recover mankind to a better state, from which they have once fallen. If their fall from that first estate introduced the evils which exist, as the Scriptures declare; we are justified in expecting that the nearer they returned towards that state, the further they would recede from evil.

This expectation is fully answered. It has been truly observed, that the virtues inculcated in the Gospel, are the only virtues which we can imagine a heavenly teacher to inculcate. As selfishness, rapacity, violence, malice, and revenge, are the vices which occasion a great part of the distress which prevails in human society; so in proportion as these are discouraged, and the contrary virtues established, peace, comfort, and harmony are restored. No doubt men have often urged, that meekness and patience under injuries are incompatible with the condition of mankind, and would surrender the feeble as a prey to the violent, and expose the best to be trampled upon by the worst and vilest of their species. And we can readily conceive, that this reasoning would have occurred to a mere man, who might have assumed to himself the title of a divine

legislator. Reverse the case, then, and suppose that the Christian law, instead of requiring forgiveness, permitted retaliation? Do we not at once acknowledge, that this would be alleged as evidence against its high pretensions? What is the actual state of society, when private vengeance is suffered to prevail? On the other hand, it is proved by experience, that meekness and forbearance prevent and check the evils which insolence and oppression create, and often disarm the violence which resistance tends to exasperate. Christianity, moreover, is designed for all; proposes to itself universal sway and dominion; and therefore cannot be expected to provide for disobedience to its enactments, or be made accountable for evils which would cease to exist if its precepts were generally followed. This would justify the rules in question, in a dispensation whose object looks beyond this world, even if they were found to occasion present inconvenience. But we possess a further proof of the more than human wisdom which framed the religion, if it issues a law of which human wisdom would dread the consequences, yet that law is found to correct and diminish mischief, even when imperfectly obeyed.

I conclude, therefore, that the nature of the Christian character affords fresh confirmation of the divine origin of the Gospel which inculcates it. In the course of things, that character could not be altogether new, especially to the Jewish nation:

many of its parts must have been previously recognized, and only derive stronger sanction from its authority. But still there is in it so much of novelty and originality, as must induce us to seek for their peculiar source; and the practical results contribute to persuade us, that the source must have been divine. Though the Christian character, before the preaching of Jesus, was in many points untried and unknown; experience has proved, that as far as it has prevailed and been acted upon, it has cleared and brightened the aspect of the moral world; and that it only needs to be universally received, in order to remove the principal evils which disturb our state on earth.

And yet with such an agent as man, and in a condition so complicated as that of human society, it is no less dangerous than difficult to introduce new modes of conduct, and new principles of action. What extensive and unforeseen results have sometimes proceeded from a single statute, like that which provides for the support of the poor in England—a single institution, like the trial by jury—a single admission, like that of the supremacy of the Roman pontiff—a single principle, as Luther's appeal to the Bible! How difficult, therefore, for the first promulgators of Christianity to foresee the possible effects of such a machine, the consequence of so new and untried an experiment; or to have anticipated

the results of its working on a subject so complex and contradictory as the human heart!

Experience, however, universally sides in favour of Christianity. Reliance upon Christ, the mainspring of the whole character, instead of producing carelessness, has quickened the apprehension of offending. Christian benevolence and sympathy afford the surest alleviation of calamity: Christian meekness and patience under injuries prove the strongest safeguard against the encroachments of violence and pride. In every view, the moral tendencies and known effects of the religion strengthen the belief, that its origin was not from earth, but from heaven: its author, not man, but God.

CHAPTER IX.

REASONABLENESS OF THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES.

It may be thought, that what is gained on the one hand, by proving the originality of the doctrines taught in the Gospel, according to the argument of the preceding chapters, is lost, on the other hand, by showing their improbability. If the Gospel proposed a probable or a reasonable system of belief, it would have been likely to occur to those who, from whatever motives, undertook to invent or introduce a new religion. If it were unlikely to occur, this will show it to be improbable and unreasonable; and so diminish, or even destroy, its credibility.

This objection is avowedly one ground of unbelief. The direct proofs of the truth of Christianity are so full, so various, and so irrefragable, that men cannot remain unbelievers through defect of evidence. They doubt or deny in spite of evidence, because of the unexpected and unpalatable nature of that which the evidence attests.

The Scriptures themselves lead us to anticipate this. They tell us, that the doctrines are such as the heart naturally revolts from: receives slowly and

unwillingly: such as are contrary to the suggestions of human philosophy, and will not be cordially embraced until the heart is brought into a docile and submissive posture, and is disposed to bow humbly before the oracles of God.

Experience has confirmed this anticipation. The leading doctrine of the Christian revelation is, "that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself; not imputing their trespasses unto them." "Christ once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God."[1] Then we are asked, "How can this be, consistently with the truth and holiness of God? Can He see us otherwise than we really are?" "In the doctrine of the sacrifice or satisfaction of Christ for the sins of men," "theological criticism seems to detect something which is irreconcileable with the truth and holiness of God."[2] The effect of arguments of this kind is to set the Bible in antagonism to the reason or conscience of man; and it is assumed that our reason or conscience must be right, although it contradicts the Bible. As has been elsewhere stated, "the principle of private judgment puts conscience between us and the Bible, making conscience the supreme interpreter, whom it may be a duty to enlighten, but it cannot be a duty to disobey."[3]

Now it will not be denied, that in proportion as

[1] Pet. iii. 18. [2] Professor Jowett on Rom. 468—474.
[3] Essays and Reviews. Essay 1. p. 45.

the doctrines revealed are extraordinary, mysterious, presenting difficulties to the mind, in such proportion is it needful that the proofs of their divine original should be clear and incontrovertible. And this evidence it is the province of reason to examine. The faculty of reason is given us for the purpose of discerning between truth and falsehood: and we are instructed to "prove all things, and hold fast that which is good." Jesus himself appealed to this criterion; saying to the people, "If ye believe not me, believe the works: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me." And again, "If I had not done among them the works that none other man did, they had not had sin:" if proofs of my divinity had not been set before them, they would not have been required to believe it:—"but now they have no cloak for their sin."[1]

It does not, however, follow, that the *subject-matter* of the revelationis among the things to be appealed to, as proving it to be a divine revelation. We cannot argue, that because the Bible delivers as truths many things which it would not have entered into the heart of man to conceive, therefore they are not truths: especially if they concern the nature of God, and the condition of man; the relation in which man stands towards God, and his ultimate destination. Setting aside the Bible, it is impos-

[1] John xv. 22; ix. 37.

sible not to be astonished at the little which mankind have ever discovered upon these momentous points: how vaguely they have conjectured, what wild opinions they have adopted. Their errors confound us, whether we are able to correct them or no. Therefore it was to be expected, that an actual revelation concerning these things should declare what was both original and surprising. And we ought to judge of the probable truth of a revelation, as far as we judge from the subject matter of it, rather by its suitableness to human nature as shown and proved by our experience, than by its agreement with any previous notions or expectations; which would be different in every age, every country, and every state of civilization.

The two points most connected with the preceding argument, at which reason is disposed to cavil, are, first, the punishment to which the Scriptures declare that men are liable from the judgments of God[1]; and, next, the means offered them to escape from that punishment, through the vicarious sufferings of Jesus as the Redeemer.[2] With respect to both of these subjects I shall propose a few observations; not attempting to exhaust the subject, which

[1] "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."—Rom. i. 18. See also ch. ii. 5, &c. &c.

[2] "This is the will of Him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life."—John vi. 40.

would require a distinct volume; but to suggest such obvious reflections as may indicate the extent and difficulty of the whole question, and so dispose the mind to a more ready acquiescence in the divine authority of the scriptural declarations.

I. The Gospel certainly represents mankind as having departed from their allegiance to God, and on that account lying under his condemnation.[1]

1. Now, in regard to the first of these statements, how far does it agree with experience? Can we deny, that in all quarters of the world, and in every age, the general conduct of men has been utterly inconsistent with such laws as we can believe agreeable to a holy and perfect Being? We hear it laid down as the dictate of reason or conscience, that the God who is in heaven must delight in virtue. But where was the virtue to be found which he should delight in, beyond the boundaries of that small nation which the Lord had "formed for himself, that they might show forth his praise"? The first duty of a creature towards his Creator is surely adoration. But no such duty had been actually paid. It had been paid to the works of his hands, or to the works of men's own hands; but the Creator himself had been universally neglected. Men had not liked to "retain him in their knowledge." So, again,

[1] See, in particular, the first two chapters to the Romans. In the fifth, this is traced back to its cause, the influence of the evil spirit upon our first parents, persuading them to disobey the express command of God.

there are certain moral qualities which our understanding tells us must be agreeable to God, and the contrary vices displeasing. We are sure, the moment that we conceive the idea of a perfect Being, that he must approve of temperance, purity, justice, charity, resignation to his will, and benevolent affections towards his creatures. We are equally sure that he must disapprove of cruelty, pride, malice, injustice, and blind indulgence of the passions. Yet what is the public history or private annals of the world, except an account of the degree in which these vices have been practised, and these virtues neglected or unknown? Such is the general picture. There are many different shades of character, both among individuals and among nations; and some, no doubt, have transgressed beyond others against the light of reason which they enjoyed, or the better knowledge existing in their age and country; and others have risen as far above the ordinary standard. But, taken collectively, mankind had lived in a way which must, we are sure, be contradictory to the will of God, if God requires obedience or approves virtue. And further, this way of life, instead of serving as a preparation for a purer and more advanced state of being, was calculated to render them more and more unfit for it the nearer they approached towards it: so that we cannot possibly suppose them admitted to such a state, without a radical change, an entire renovation, of character.

Independent of all inquiry into causes, this is the aspect which the moral condition of the human race actually presented at the time assigned to the birth of Jesus. And the question meets us, In what light God views such a state? whether he regards it as a moral Governor, or no?

Upon this point we must abide by one of these two suppositions. Either he is indifferent as to human character, and takes no notice of it: or he will punish habitual neglect of his government, and violation of the laws of moral duty. The first of these was the avowed opinion of Epicurus and his followers, among the ancients, and is the practical belief of many at all times. It is certainly in direct opposition to the principles on which the Gospel rests. But it is no less contrary to the best conclusions of our reason, and to many indications afforded us by the actual appearance of the world.

The idea is strongly imprinted upon the mind of man, even without revelation, that God will "discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not,"[1] according to the light which he enjoys. Those whose reason has been most exercised in every age, and those whose moral views have been least perverted by habits which such a conviction would disturb, have acquiesced generally in this belief, at least as considered in theory: though as to the

[1] Mal. ch. iii.

when or the where, they have been unable to give account. For we cannot but allow that the recompenses made to either class, in the present life, are very imperfect. The instances of successful wickedness, and of unrewarded virtue, are not rare. And even though notorious and flagrant vices commonly bring their own chastisement; there is a sober sort of intemperance, and a prudent degree of covetousness, and a sharp attention to self-interest and self-indulgence, which is much more common, and has no more concern with the service of God, and no more regard to his will, or to the good of his creatures, than more open profligacy: yet which is perhaps the likeliest temper for procuring the advantages and enjoying the pleasures of this life. A man of this habit and disposition will provide more largely for himself and his family; will live more easily and smoothly; will experience fewer crosses and vexations than often befall the Christian, who is "working out his salvation with fear and trembling." As far as this world is concerned, he will be more prosperous. The other may enjoy a purer peace, a holier satisfaction; but it will not be derived from anything which this world confers upon him. It will not arise from present circumstances or advantages; but will be internal, and prospective.

This appears even from the acknowledgments which are daily made by infidels themselves. "What will become of you," said one to his pious friend,

"if there is no future state?" To which question only one reply could be made: "What will be your case if there is?" There is, in fact, a general conviction that this world's advantages are not best consulted by those who are mainly anxious about another; and that all who pursue this object consistently, walk in a path rugged as well as narrow, and are exposed, in most situations, to many inconveniences and obstructions.

Yet, independently of all that is declared in Scripture, we cannot doubt that persons living thus differently, are very differently regarded in the sight of God. It must be so, if we allow him to be possessed of justice, goodness, holiness: of such qualities as we require to make even the perfect man. It is virtual atheism, to believe that God is equally pleased with the voluptuary or the worldling, who acknowledges no laws but those of pleasure or ambition, and with a Christian who restrains even legitimate desires, lest they should obtain undue influence: that he beholds with the same eyes a Lazarus, bearing a life of penury with fortitude and a death of torture with resignation; and a Dives, immersed in selfish gratifications, and never raising his thoughts towards the Giver of all good. Yet, where are they recompensed? Certainly not in this life; and, if future retribution is a dream, nowhere.

Take the case of St. Paul, whose example I select in place of thousands whose characters would suit

this argument equally well, only because the events of his life are familiarly known. I do not, of course, assume the truth of Christianity; but I suppose it will be allowed, that he believed it to be true; and that by his labours and his sacrifices in that cause, he considered that he was serving God. For the sake, then, of what he believed to be God's service, he resigned what men by common consent hold most valuable: relations, reputation, the esteem of his countrymen; he endured the loss of every worldly comfort; he underwent the severest privations and sufferings; he exposed himself to a cruel death daily; and at last he met it. Now even if he were mistaken as to the absolute duty of this course of conduct, which depends on the truth of Christianity; still his mistake does not blemish his moral character; and the Supreme Being, such a Supreme Being as any enlightened philosopher will own or adore, must regard a life so devoted to his service, and sacrifices so readily made in obedience to what was supposed to be his will, with complacency and approbation. Yet this man, if in this life only he had hope, was of all men most miserable. So truly so, that many of the heathens desired, out of pure compassion, to dissuade the Christians from resigning what was most delightful in life, and braving what was most terrible in death, as they believed without prospect of return.

And the case is the same with regard to all obedi-

ence to the supposed will of God, paid, because it is understood to be his will. Such obedience cannot be maintained without sacrifices of some sort: a renunciation of present interests, a mortification of present inclinations, for which it cannot be said that this world makes any immediate return.

If, then, we deny that God will award a future recompense to the righteous and the wicked, according to their respective lives, we may acknowledge, indeed, a Deity, whose existence and whose power are shown by the works of the creation; but we take from him all moral attributes. We make him indifferent to what is done with the purpose of conforming to his will, and to what is done in open defiance or careless neglect of it. We make him indifferent to those qualities which in ourselves command our most reasonable approbation or dislike. We suppose that he has implanted in us reason to distinguish between the grand outlines of good and evil; and conscience to admonish us when we offend against what is known to be morally right, and pursue what we feel to be wrong; yet that he is himself unconcerned as to the choice we may make, and the road we may pursue. In judging of men, we should think this very inconsistent with a perfect character. We should think a parent censurable, who should make no difference between the children who might have deserted, and those who had supported him; between the Goneril who had betrayed,

and the Cordelia who had cherished him. We should blame the master, who not only left the servant who had robbed him unnoticed, but failed to reward the other who had devoted his powers or risked his life in his cause. We should not admire the king who beheld the traitors who had opposed him, and his most faithful adherents, with the same eyes of indifference; and, having every dispensation in his own power, allowed the principal share of advantage to belong to his enemies rather than his friends. And this natural feeling becomes far more sacred, when we remember that, in the case under consideration, the service on the one hand, and the disobedience on the other, is connected with a moral difference of character.

These illustrations, however short they may fall of exactness, serve the purpose for which they are brought; they show that we not only see, in our natural judgments, a wide distinction between virtuous and vicious conduct, but that we expect them to be differently treated. Many sins, indeed, are declared in Scripture to be hateful to God, to incur divine condemnation, towards which we are ourselves disposed to be very lenient; but there are other sins which we even wish to see rewarded as they deserve; and are indignant when heinous cruelty, or rapacity, or treachery escapes unpunished. Men sometimes, in speaking of the divine wrath, attempt to palliate guilt as the effect of situation,

and the concurrence of inevitable circumstance: but when the case comes nearer into view, and the moral sense operates unperverted, they acknowled by their judgments that guilt is guilt, and that the look upon punishment as what it naturally deserve and ought necessarily to incur.

Upon the whole, then, the idea of God's futu judgment awaiting those who have transgressed h laws, and refused him obedience, instead of contr dicting our natural sentiments, or the dictates of o reason, does in fact agree with them, and confir them. We, indeed, are inadequate judges of t degree of guilt which mankind have incurred, or t degree of punishment which awaits it. We are t much interested in the cause to decide it. Dai examples prove how differently we estimate tran gressions against the majesty and holiness of Go and transgressions of which we see the immedia consequences in the evil which they produce in th world. But it may be concluded, generally, that i forms no internal evidence against the divine origi of the Gospel, that it represents men to be liable t the wrath of their Creator. They have transgresse against him: reason and conscience lead us to expect that transgression shall be followed by punishment; but punishment is neither universally nor equally awarded in this world: it is not, therefore, improbable, that it may be awarded in another state, as the Christian religion declares it will be.

In contradiction to these analogical reasonings, many will be disposed to argue, that God would not have placed mankind in circumstances where he must have foreseen their fall, if the consequences of falling were so fatally serious. He would not have created a race, of whom so large a portion would perish everlastingly.

We touch here upon a great difficulty, which, in our present state of knowledge, or rather of ignorance, it is impossible to clear up. There would be more force in the objection, if this were the only fact in the appearance of the world which baffled our inquiries, or contradicted our expectations. But it is only one of a series of difficulties, which meet us at every view of the creation; which revelation does not enable us entirely to unravel; but which are still more inexplicable, if we set aside revelation.

Future punishment of the offences of this life is supposed to be incompatible with the goodness of God, who created man under circumstances of such tremendous responsibility. But is it not a fact, that numberless cases appear before us daily, incompatible with the abstract idea of divine goodness which we should be inclined to form? I do not see the eternal world, and therefore I may deny that misery, as the result of misconduct in this earthly state, will exist there. So if I did not see the present world, I might deny that pain, and sorrow, and the many physical evils which abound, could exist in the work

of an omnipotent Creator. But I should be mistaken. And so those may be mistaken, who, on no better grounds than *à priori* reasoning, promise themselves impunity in the world to come. We must frame our notions in conformity with what we see, rather than what we might imagine. And surely the person who looks abroad into the natural world will find much to surprise him, much that is inconsistent with the views of philosophical perfection which he would fondly desire to entertain. The book of nature is at least as mysterious as the book of revelation.[1]

Consider, for example, the degree of laborious exertion which is inseparably mixed up with the constitution of the world; which mankind must either submit to, or be savages. The great majority of persons in this country, of all classes, exercise severe toil, either of body or mind, ten hours in the day. If they remitted this, they could not subsist; neither could those indispensable supplies be furnished on which the comfort of the whole community depends. I am not insensible to the many alleviations which make this labour tolerable: but if we were judging beforehand, or picturing a world from imagination, would it bear this form?

[1] It is not the business of this treatise to enter more fully upon this subject. I only suggest a train of reasoning, in answer to an obvious and plausible objection; which the reader may carry on in his own mind, or find completed in the most masterly style, in Butler's "Analogy of Natural and Revealed Religion."

The pain, distress, and privation, which meet us wherever we look, are no less perplexing. Pain, arising from the very constitution of our bodies, and apparently inseparable from it. Distress, arising from the abruption of earthly connexions, and the irreparable loss of those who made life valuable. Privation, arising from no arbitrary distribution of the goods of life, or rapacity on the part of othe men, or accidental misfortune; but from the co dition into which mankind are naturally brought, every country, and at every stage of civilizatio Remove from these universal dispensations wh may be called their moral cause, i. e. their effec on character, and the religious purposes which th serve;—which considerations we must remove, if we desert revelation;—and then say, whether the world answers our previous anticipations?

Other circumstances connected with the nature of mankind are equally unaccountable. As in the most most favourable season of the most genial climate, all fruit attains the most complete perfection, and falls in its maturity: such is the condition which we should look for in the chief production of nature, the human race. But of those born into the world, how many perish, before they have either known or communicated enjoyment, or indeed caused any feelings but those of anxiety and sorrow: how many of those who attain a riper age, are cut off at the moment when they were beginning to repay the labours of

education! How many others fall in the very meridian of vigour and usefulness; and how large a proportion, from the unfavourable circumstances in which they are placed, and the moral perversion of their hearts, live and die under a total incapacity of fulfilling those functions which might be expected of moral agents, the rational creatures of God, inhabiting a world which he had designed as their abode!

It is not my purpose to insist further on these topics, which I only suggest in the way of defensive argument, and leave for the reflection of the candid sceptic. Whatever ground he may take, short of absolute atheism, he will be unable to account for these and other phenomena of the world around him. He will find facts inconsistent with his theories. He will see appearances which confute his philosophy. He will be involved in difficulties much greater than any which he complains of in Scripture. It is the error of those who cannot or will not think, to imagine that the principal difficulties in religion belong to revealed religion. They encounter the Deist stil more obstinately than the Christian. They encounter every man who is not prepared to say that this world and all it contains is the work of blind chance and not of intelligent Omnipotence.

Perhaps, then, it may be wise to take this ground; and, on account of these perplexities, withdraw our thoughts from all religion whatever, and plunge into atheism? But here we shall meet more

difficulties still. Every plant, every animal, every object of nature which we cast our eyes upon, contains a refutation of atheism. We need go no further than ourselves: the mechanism which we carry about in our bodies, and which is constantly at work; the feelings of which we are conscious, the powers which we exercise, and the intellect which we possess, carry us irresistibly back to a source of all these wonders, and fasten down our faith to an intelligent Creator.

If, then, it is a difficulty, which I am very willing to concede it is, to understand why God should have created moral agents liable to the consequences of misemployed free agency, supposing those consequences to be so calamitous as the Christian Scriptures affirm: it is not a single or solitary instance of difficulty; it is only one of many inexplicable circumstances connected with the present state of mankind. If the case were otherwise, and as long as we confined our views to what is called natural religion, all were clear and intelligible, and the world only became perplexing through the interference of Christianity; this would be a plausible argument against Christianity, requiring us to look with additional vigilance into the direct evidence by which it is established. But this cannot be pretended. Christianity, in fact, furnishes the only clue. It does not acquaint us why we are born in a labyrinth; but it conducts us out of one, in which,

without that guide, we must remain and wander for ever.

I conclude, therefore, that the doctrine contained in the Gospel, of the guilt and condemnation of man, is not of such a nature as to set aside the evidences of its truth which we derive from other sources. That doctrine, instead of opposing, rather coincides with other undeniable facts or appearances which confront us in the world, and agrees with the apprehensions which mankind are disposed to entertain, and have, in some degree, entertained, in all ages.

II. The second point of leading interest which I proposed to consider, is the Christian doctrine of redemption; i. e. of remission, through the sacrifice of Christ, of the penalty incurred by the sinfulness of mankind.

The credibility of this doctrine depends in a great measure on the reception given to the former. If we hold the general alienation from God, and neglect of his government which has prevailed among men, to be a light matter; if we say with the infidels of old, "God careth not for it;" and mock at the idea of his inflicting punishment upon his creatures; then the doctrine of redemption must necessarily appear "foolishness." But, suppose the contrary: a supposition, which, as I have shown, is not inconsistent with many intimations which the

world actually presents: then we cannot be su prised at the means revealed in the Gospel for tl remedy of so vast an evil.

It is easy to cavil at those means, and the natu of the remedy: to pretend that justice and mer are one with God; and that if he sees fit to pardo human offences, he can pardon them without re quiring a substitute. This is, in truth, the ver question at issue.

It might, indeed, have been the message of tl Gospel, as it had been of the prophets in form times, "Return unto the Lord, and he will hav mercy upon you, and to your God, for he wi abundantly pardon." This would have been an a of mercy; but would it have produced the effe which was essentially needful as a part of the divin purposes? Would it sufficiently have "condemne sin;" have shown to mankind what they are so slo and unwilling to believe, that sin is "the abomin ble thing which God hates," making "a separatio between man and God," the end of which mu inevitably be destruction from the presence of th Lord and the glory of his power?

Here, however, we are met by a denial, that sin is in fact condemned, or that divine justice is prove by the crucifixion of Jesus; and it is asked, "How could the sufferings of a good or divine man exhibit the righteousness of God? Rather would they seem to indicate his indifference to those sufferings

in permitting them; in not giving his Son ten legions of angels to overcome his enemies."[1]

Yet when the judge at a human tribunal sentences a criminal to death, and is neither moved by a wife's tears or a family's desolation; it is not that he is indifferent to sufferings, but that his feelings for those sufferings are absorbed in the interests of the community, requiring such proof of the consequences which follow crime.

The governor of our own or any other civilized country could not grant impunity to those who transgressed the laws enacted in that country, without overturning the whole system of government. God has to deal with the same agents: why is it so sure that impunity, on his part, would be followed by no similar consequences?

The great problem with every conscientious magistrate is, How he can exercise lenity without injury to the general cause of morals and good order? If he could grant a free pardon, without encouraging licentiousness, and increasing the number of offenders, no punishment would ever be inflicted.

So with respect to the moral guilt of the human race. We can hardly doubt that our world, and the circumstances in which we are placed in it, are part of a scheme more extended than we at present un-

[1] See Professor Jowett on Romans, p. 474.

derstand. And in that general scheme, misery, or what we term punishment, may be the natural and necessary consequence of guilt; and moral government may require, for reasons just now hinted, that such consequence should really follow, such punishment should not be dispensed with. The Scriptures seem to lead us to views of this sort. They often represent punishment, i. e. the displeasure and abhorrence of God, as falling upon sin, not so much in the way of sentence as of immediate and necessary result. Thus Jesus intimates that spiritual death is the state to which mankind were naturally reduced by sin, when he declares, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."[1] Of those who "do not believe in the Son of God," he affirms, that "they are condemned already;"[2] that they abide in darkness; that their "sin remaineth." The Apostle argues to the same purpose, when he says, that "sin had reigned unto death;" that "death had passed upon all men, for that all had sinned."[3] And the general tenor of the Scriptures leads us, upon the whole, to conclude that what we call, using the language of men, the anger of God against sin, is an essential part of his attributes;

[1] John v. 24. [2] John iii. 18; xii. 46; ix. 41.
[3] Rom. v. 21, 12.

that he views the condition to which men are consequently reduced with pity; but that such is the nature of his government, that whilst the moral state remains the same, there can be no grant of pardon, no admission into his favour.

Objections, no doubt, may be urged on the other side. It is not pretended that we can clear up all the perplexities of the moral world. If a man is determined to close his eyes against revelation until that is done, he must keep them shut for ever. There are some things of which he must be content to be ignorant; must silence the pride of his understanding by the futility of "replying against God," or of supposing that He should not "do right," to whose wisdom and goodness the whole created world bears testimony.

Under the influence of these considerations let him suppose the case which the Gospel assumes; that it was the divine purpose to exhibit a scheme of government in which mercy and justice should meet together: in which God might exert his merciful desire of recovering mankind from their lost condition, and yet preserve unimpaired the laws of his moral government. Then appears the fitness and consistency of the truths declared in the Gospel. "God is just," and shows his abhorrence of sin; and yet he is merciful, and "justifies those that believe in Jesus."[1]

[1] Rom. iii. 26.

For although it is the doctrine of the Gospel, tha the death of Jesus is received as an atonement fo the sins of every individual who accepts the benefi of his redemption: yet we should err in represent ing his death as merely a gratuitous substitution o innocence for guilt: it exhibited, at the same time, a public display of the inevitable consequences of sin.[1] It was directed against that very error which is most deeply rooted, and most practically injurious: the error of supposing that the conduct of men is a matter of indifference to their Creator; that no future consequences depend upon the course of life which may be led upon earth. Every offence which is committed against the light of reason, or of conscience, or of the divine law, is a practical effect of this error; and the inadequate restraint which a vague idea of future retribution exercised amongst the ancient heathens, and which a more general conviction of future judgment exercises now, is a proof of the slowness of the heart to be swayed by the dread of an unseen Being, or the fear of an unknown consequence. Some reject every idea of retribution. Others overlook the prospect of its extending to themselves. Multitudes imagine, that though what they consider very heinous sins may be

[1] The third chapter of Mr. Erskine's treatise on the Internal Evidences, exhibits this view of the atonement in a most convincing manner. The whole volume is admirably calculated to meet the doubts of a philosophical objector.

avenged, yet a neglect of their Maker, and a systematic indulgence of the natural passions, and in particular the transgression, whatever it be, to which they are individually most addicted, will be passed over. The deceitfulness of the heart; the prevalence of vice; the moral disorder of the world, encourage all these delusions. Men contemplate the habits of their fellow-creatures, instead of the divine holiness; and comfort themselves with the poor satisfaction that the majority are in the same condition with themselves.[1]

Now of these vague or false imaginations, every one is swept away when the mysterious truth is cordially believed,—the Son of God appearing in the form of man, and undergoing the punishment due to man. So stupendous a sacrifice discovers the misery of those in whose favour it was prepared. It speaks a language which cannot be refuted: a language addressed to the heart no less than to the reason. It puts an end to the delusive hope, that men may pass through the world regardless of God as their Creator, and disobedient to him as their moral Governor, and yet fear no evil: that if any eternity lies before them, it must needs be an

[1] Ut sit magna, tamen certe lenta ira Deorum est.
Si curant igitur cunctos punire nocentes,
Quando ad me venient? Sed et exorabile numen
Fortasse experiar.
Sic animum dira trepidum formidine culpæ
Confirmant. Juven. xiii. 100.

eternity of blessedness. Let them be once persuaded, that one who "was with God in the beginning, and was God," became man, that he might redeem men from the penalty incurred by their sins; that he might satisfy the offended justice of God in behalf of all who should commit themselves to him as a deliverer and a ruler: then there is an end of all vague conjectures and groundless expectations. We know that sin is noticed, nay, is condemned, by God, because he required a propitiation for it: we are sure that its recompense is dreadful, since a dreadful recompense has already been undergone. If Jesus suffered the death which is reserved for the worst of human crimes, we have convincing evidence of the doom which impends over all for whom he is not a substitute. His cross exhibits an inscription which testifies at once "the goodness and the severity of God: on them that continue rebellious, severity:" but goodness towards all that "receive his goodness."[1] For if God spared not his own Son; if the bitter cup might not pass from him, except he drank it, how vain must be the prevalent expectation, that, if there is another world, those who fear him, and those who fear him not, will fare in it equally well!

The force of this palpable argument, this sensible proof of the evil of sin, is sufficiently exemplified by

[1] See Rom. xi. 22.

its effects. It daily produces a transformation of moral character, which nothing else can achieve. Its power is attested by the fact which some deny, and others treat as a paradox, but which really admits of easy explanation, and is confirmed by every page in the annals of Christianity; that those persons are uniformly the most fearful of sin, and the most singular in their walk of holiness, who have the fullest reliance upon redemption through Jesus. There is nothing wonderful or unaccountable in this; it is the natural effect of their belief. For they, of all men, have the liveliest conviction of the responsibility, danger, and lamentable consequences of sin. Others may hesitate, and do hesitate, to admit the certainty of its condemnation. But they who believe in the sacrifice of Christ have the clearest apprehension and assurance of this truth. Nothing can make so certain the punishment, which, if indulged, it will hereafter incur, as the punishment which it has actually incurred. In proportion, therefore, as a man's views of the atonement are clear, his abhorrence and dread of opposing the divine will are sincere and operative. The cross of Christ is at once a refuge in which his conscience may find shelter, and a beacon holding forth to him a constant warning against the carelessness, the errors, and the corruptions of the world.

If, leaving reasoning, we appeal to fact, we might justly ask, whether any other motive has ever been

effectual in diverting or reclaiming man from sin, compared with the truth that "Christ suffered for sin, bearing our sins in his own body"? Strange as we may justly deem it, that the misery resulting from a course of vicious habits, or the blessings attending a moral and virtuous practice, shall so slightly influence man's conduct; daily experience shows us, that those consequences have little sensible effect,—whilst a true belief in the blood of Christ, shed for the remission of sins, does really take away sin's dominion, and "cleanses from all unrighteousness."

If this, then, is the acknowledged result and the practical effect of the death of Jesus, we seem to approach towards a clearer understanding of the wisdom of that mysterious dispensation.

Let the objector calmly reflect upon the state in which the Gospel found the human race. There is surely nothing unreasonable in supposing that a revelation should be made to creatures so ignorant as men were, without revelation, of all that can possibly be pleasing to a holy and perfect Being. Let him consider, further, to what it professes to lead them. And I think he must allow, that if a revelation were to be made with the intent of convincing men of their sinfulness, and of their need of moral regeneration, and of assisting their progress in this necessary work, the Christian dispensation contains everything essential to such a purpose. Admit the end: and we cannot deny the suitableness of the means.

The Scriptures declare, that God is offended. Reason and conscience confirm the fact; and point out the difference between the character of man and the commands of God. He, then, against whom we have transgressed, is our Creator; who by the same power which gave us being, has power also to destroy; to "destroy both body and soul." The first thing we might desire to our comfort and coufidence is, that one who should undertake to deliver us from this danger, and avert the wrath of Almighty God, should also be almighty, that without hesitation we might trust our cause in his hands. And this is declared to us in the Gospel. We are there assured, that he who undertook the redemption of man is indeed God; was "with God from the beginning;" and claimed to himself nothing to which he was not entitled, and took away from God nothing of his dignity and majesty, when he affirmed himself to be "equal with God." This gives to the Christian a sure ground of reliance, to believe that he who made propitiation for us, is equal to him whom we have offended: that "he and the Father are one."

Still the thoughts of men fail before the contemplation of the greatness of God. We find it difficult to conceive the idea of Him whom no man has seen at any time. There would be a satisfaction in having one whom we might think of more easily; feel nearer to; apply to with less of awe. Hence pro-

bably the ready recurrence of mankind to visible representations of the Deity, and to unauthorized mediators; they feel the need of something to which their minds may attach themselves more familiarly. And this wish, apparently so impracticable, meets its fulfilment in the Christian doctrine of God incarnate; "God with us;" "God manifest in the flesh." He removes the veil which separated God from man. "He brings down to our conceptions, in a manner the most familiar and impressive, those high attributes of truth, and justice, and mercy, which could not be felt or understood as they existed in the abstract and invisible Deity."[1]

In addition to these two leading points, the reconcilement of rebellious subjects to their King, and the introducing of that King to the knowledge of his subjects with less array of terror: the indirect effects of the Christian doctrine are wonderfully suited to the nature and situation of mankind.

There is in many a meek and humble disposition, tremblingly alive to the majesty of God, which might doubt his willingness to accept the repentance of his creatures, and to pardon the transgressions which, once committed, must be for ever present to his view. The mortifications, superstitious, penances, and voluntary martyrdoms which men in

[1] Chalmers.

different ages and countries have imposed upon themselves, prove that this is a feeling to which the mind naturally inclines when awakened to any sense of religion, but only partially informed. The holiness of God, if revealed to us without an indisputable evidence of his love, might have repelled instead of attracting our endeavours to serve and please him. But fears of this kind, which of all others deserve most tenderness, vanish at once before the belief that "God so loved the world, as to give his only Son" for its redemption; and that Jesus, in love and pity for the souls of men, bore the infirmities of the flesh, and laid down his life for their sakes. Such thoughts administer consolation to the remorse of a wounded conscience, and give fresh vigour to obedience. Are we so precious in the sight of God, as the mysterious plan of redemption emboldens us to believe? Then is there, indeed, good hope, that he will be favourable to our penitence, and accept our imperfect and unworthy services.

Again, the humble condition in which Jesus appeared, might at first sight be deemed inconsistent with the high character which he assumed. And certainly it is improbable that men who contrived a fiction, should represent the Son of God to be so born and so descended; or if they invented the history of his life, should make it so little dignified, so little attractive to the imagination. But when

we consider the whole purpose ascribed to him; not only to offer an atonement for sin, but to show a pattern of virtue; not only to reconcile men to God, but to "leave them an example" of a life led according to his will: then what might be thought an inconsistency in his history, becomes an additional testimony to its truth. Had he assumed a situation of worldly splendour, had he been invested with the dignity of royal honours, he might have furnished an example of moderation in affluence, and of humility in power, to that very small proportion of mankind to whom riches or honours can ever belong. But to the vast majority of what mankind are and always must be in all ages, he could have left no lesson. They could not have trodden in his steps, for he would have walked in paths very different from theirs.

Philosophical teachers, indeed, have commonly bestowed little thought upon the poor and uninstructed classes, who were neither able to appreciate nor repay their labours. But in the sight of God we cannot possibly imagine that one of his reasonable creatures is more valued than another, however different their earthly conditions. The probability is, therefore, that the interests of the majority would be consulted. And to how great a degree they are consulted by the poverty and humility of Jesus, is seen by daily experience. No consolation is more frequently recurred to, or more gratefully received,

than the reflection that he, the Son of God, came not "to be ministered unto, but to minister," and often "had not where to lay his head." The evils of life lose much of their bitterness, when it is believed that similar evils were actually experienced by him "who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven;" and who having himself suffered human trials, and known human infirmities, is able "to succour them that are tempted." For it was no temporary character that he assumed. His office was not finished, nor his mercy exhausted, when he left this world. The Christian enjoys an additional encouragement in the difficult warfare which he must needs maintain in his progress towards eternity, from the assurance that he whose compassion was first attracted by the state of man, still extends his care over all who apply to him; still watches their spiritual interests, and intercedes for their many failings; so that enlivened by his presence, and strengthened by his support, they may go on their way rejoicing, and fulfil the course of probation allotted them.

It appears, therefore, that the Christian doctrine of redemption through a Mediator, is intelligible, as well as original; and is recommended to our reason no less than to our faith. Considered as it ought in all fairness to be considered, according to things as they exist, and in connexion with the actual state of the world and of mankind, it derives additional

probability from its adaptation to the purpose for which it was professedly devised. It finds mankind in a condition of moral ruin and spiritual ignorance:—whatever be the cause, this fact is indisputable;—and it brings to their restoration a deliverer, who is God, with power to save;—who is man, with tenderness to pity;—who has assured mankind of his love, by a proof the most incontrovertible and endearing;—who is with us, to animate our exertions in his service;—and is with God, to "make intercession" for our infirmities. These considerations are calculated, beyond any others which can be imagined or proposed, to enable such a being as man to pursue a religious course in his passage through this world. It has been proved by the experience of successive ages, that the faith against which it has been said that our "moral sense revolts," is the faith by which the noblest hearts have been inspired, and from which the noblest actions have proceeded. It has supported the servants of God, through eighteen centuries, in labours most abundant and in trials above measure; it has overcome the love of country, of possessions, of dearest friends and relations, and has carried the missionary into lands frozen with ice, or scorched with heat, or poisoned with disease; it is daily encouraging the ministers of the gospel to seek out the abodes of vice and misery and destitution, in the hope that spiritual fruit may be gathered, and

their crucified Lord may "see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied." It gives strength to the repentant transgressor, and enables him to resist the temptations of Satan, to contend against habits long indulged, to "cut off the right hand, or pluck out the right eye," rather than "crucify the Son of God afresh," and "put" the Author of his everlasting hope "to shame."

If we are to judge of the tree by its fruits, that tree cannot be unsound from which such fruits proceed; fruits which have never sprung from any other root, than from faith in Him "who gave himself for us, that He might make us partakers of the divine nature, and deliver us from this present evil world." [1]

[1] See Christian Observer, No. 214.

CHAPTER X.

FIRST PROMULGATION OF CHRISTIANITY.

I HAVE shown, in the preceding chapters, the strong internal evidence which supports the divine authority of the Christian Scriptures. And yet a great deal of internal evidence must always remain, which it is not possible to draw out into actual proof. The attentive reader of the New Testament will find this at every turn; and the best use he can make of the arguments which have been urged, would be to employ them as hints according to which he might examine the Gospel for himself.

I come now to consider the first propagation of the religion. We have indisputable proof that it was actively and successfully propagated, and made its way with surprising rapidity, when we know that there were multitudes of Christians of both sexes and of all ages, in Rome, in Greece, and in various parts of Asia, within seventy years of the crucifixion.[1]

[1] See ch. i. p. 8. At large in Paley, p. ii. c. ix.

This is an historical truth; and when the nature of the religion, its originality, and its demands, are considered, it may well be reckoned an extraordinary fact. We may, indeed, be loosely told, that mankind are naturally fond of the marvellous; that the ignorant are prone to superstition; and that in a barbarous age or country any idle tale finds a multitude ready to give it their belief. But a reasonable man will not be satisfied with anything so vague as this. Though the marvellous may be greedily listened to, when it demands nothing further than an idle acquiescence, mankind are more circumspect and incredulous when they are called upon to sacrifice all their former opinions, desires, habits, and prejudices. The cause could not be forwarded by Jewish superstition, since it is abundantly plain, that the Jews were extremely slow and unwilling to receive Christianity, and in fact never did adopt it, as a people; neither can we resort to barbarism, since among the nations which furnished the first proselytes, were some of the most civilized then existing, in an age proverbial for civilization. It becomes, therefore, an interesting object of inquiry, to trace the manner in which Christianity first gained ground.

However familiarly spoken of, it is not an occurrence of every day to change the religion of mankind. Should any one affirm the contrary, no sufficient reason can be alleged, why that should not

be practicable now, which is believed to have been found practicable eighteen hundred years ago. Let us imagine a similar case; and suppose a number of persons in this or any other country to associate themselves together, and profess that they had a commission from God to model anew the civil and religious institutions of the land, and re-establish, for example's sake, the principles of the law of Moses. Suppose them to assert, in conformity with this pretension, that God required the nation to lay aside their present religious services, and to introduce in their stead, the Jewish ceremonial: to resort for the purpose of national worship annually to the capital city, as the Israelites were accustomed to do: to abstain from certain kinds of food; and to keep holy the original Sabbath, instead of the day of Jesus' resurrection. Or farther; that he commanded them to leave their fields unsown, and their orchards unpruned, every seventh year, and not to gather during that year even the spontaneous produce of the ground: to make no bargains of sale for their lands beyond fifty years, but that all estates purchased during the intermediate period should be resigned at the expiration of that term to the original owner.

This would be, as Christianity was, a new religion; and Christianity, from its Jewish converts, required a renunciation of prejudices, and from the Gentiles a change of habits and customs, not less complete

and violent. The doctrine of the resurrection of a person who had suffered on the cross, and of baptism in his name for remission of sins, was not more agreeable to their natural prepossessions than anything in the case here imagined. Private interests were equally affected, when they that believed forsook their houses or lands or their nearest relatives "for the kingdom of God's sake," or "sold their possessions and goods, and had all things common."[1]

It is useful sometimes to realize an idea. Let us suppose doctrines of this sort to be preached within our own knowledge. Every individual would feel that some or other of the provisions of such an innovation concerned himself. Argument, therefore, of every kind would be employed, from the clamour of the vulgar up to the reason of the well-informed. The most charitable opinion would set down such teachers as fanatics, who might believe themselves the servants of God, but were really under the grossest delusion. But the more general opinion would condemn them as workers of mischief under the disguise of religion. No individual would listen to the improbable pretence, that they acted under a divine commission: they would be reckoned enthusiasts or impostors, who must either be silenced or punished.

Those, however, who had undertaken a scheme of this nature, would of course be prepared for opposi-

[1] Luke xviii. 29. Acts ii. 44.

tion. We may conceive that they would be furnished with arguments in defence of the regulations just now supposed; and reference might be made to the law of Moses, by which these very customs and ordinances were once established. But it would be waste of time to prove that argument, persuasion, and assertion would be equally unable to gain attention to such innovators.[1] Those who believe the national religion to be from God, would condemn them: those who regard it not, would despise them.

Suppose them to go farther still, in order to establish their claim to be heard. Suppose them to confess that they depended on argument no farther than to explain their object; that the proofs of their mission were of a different nature; that they did not expect to be believed on their own assertion, but appealed to proofs of supernatural assistance by which their mission was authenticated. It is evident

[1] Unless, indeed, the argument might prove an accomplishment of prophecy, and, therefore, show a species of miracle. The force of the appeal made by Jesus and the Apostles to the Jewish Scriptures depended entirely on the accordance of those Scriptures with their mission. If it be urged, that their success was favoured by their reference to writings which the Jews acknowledged to be sacred, two important inferences follow: first, that the alleged prophecies were in previous existence; next, that they agreed with the circumstances under which "Jesus who was called Christ," actually appeared, and lived, and died.

Luther, by appealing to the Scriptures, made a very successful innovation in religion. But if there had been no Scriptures of authority acknowledged to be paramount, or if these had not borne him out in his appeal, would he have been listened to for a moment?

that this pretence would avail them, or not, exactly according to its agreement or disagreement with positive facts. We can easily conceive fanatic persons claiming credit for a power of working miracles, to whom no such power belonged; but we cannot conceive such persons being generally attended to and credited, unless their claim were supported by facts too plain to be denied. If no supernatural power accompanied them, the pretence to it would only sink them lower in public estimation; instead of deluded enthusiasts, they would be treated as designing impostors; and the idea of their establishing a new religion on the ruins of the old would become more visionary than ever. In a very few days the attempt itself, and the party which had undertaken it, would be numbered among things forgotten. Give them rank; give them authority; give them education; let no external advantages be wanting; still the barrier opposed by national belief, prescriptive customs, and personal habits, is so strong, that it has never been overcome without some commensurate power, civil or military. Whoever will look into the subject so steadily, as to propose to his mind an attempt like that under consideration, will perceive that I have not exaggerated its difficulties. Yet these difficulties were encountered by the Apostles. I have supposed nothing greater than they attempted; nothing greater than

they achieved; and not in a single city, but over half the world; the same scheme which we at once declare to be impracticable as to our own age or country, was tried within the first century throughout the most civilized parts of the world then known, and succeeded.

Let us inquire how it succeeded. The account which is borne on the face of the history relates, that at an annual feast at Jerusalem, the attention of certain Jews who had resorted thither from many different countries for the purpose of national worship, was attracted by a party of Galileans, who addressed the multitude in their respective languages. We can form some idea of the nature of such an occurrence, by figuring to ourselves a Jewish assembly in any of the European capitals, where Jews of every country are assembled; and supposing twelve persons of the same persuasion, who were known never to have travelled, to begin a comment upon the Hebrew Scriptures, in the different languages of Europe.

During the inquiry which this circumstance excited, one of these, named Peter, who had been a fisherman in his native province, Galilee, undertook to explain the subject of the general astonishment by referring to a passage in their prophets, whose authority all acknowledged; and which contained a promise of interposition like that which the assembly

was now witnessing. And he proceeded to this effect, declaring the purpose of the present miracle.[1]

Hear my explanation of this visible interposition of Almighty power. Ye, the men of Israel, have crucified Jesus of Nazareth; to whose divine mission God bore witness by the miracles which he enabled him to perform in the sight of you all. God, however, has raised him from the dead, as your great prophet David foretold concerning him, in a passage with which you are familiar; but which, you must be aware, cannot apply to David, whose death and burial are undisputed: but which does, in truth, foretell the resurrection of that expected Messiah whom God had promised from the race of David. We here stand up and testify, that Jesus has risen again, according to the prophecy; and that he has shed forth upon us his disciples the Holy Spirit, the effects of which ye now see and hear. "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

This was the first public declaration of the divinity or Messiahship of Jesus, after his death; and was so convincing to the hearers, that three thousand from that moment made open confession of their belief, and were added to the existing body of his disciples.

[1] See Acts ii. 14, &c.

Now there must surely have been something very insuperable in the proofs presented to the minds of this assembly, when so large a number pleaded guilty to the charge of having been accessary to the execution of one whom they ought to have recognized as bearing a divine commission by the works which he performed; and even agreed to embrace a religion preached in his name, as the only remaining condition of pardon. They must have been impressed with a very strong conviction, before they consented to acknowledge him as the Son of God, who not two months before had suffered the death of a malefactor. There is no time when men are less likely, without overpowering testimony, to acknowledge a fact, than when it proves themselves guilty. Nor was there any imaginable reason for their making this concession, except the conviction of their understandings and their consciences. There was nothing said to excite their passions, nothing to alarm their fears, nothing to raise their hopes, unless it derived force from undeniable facts. There was no proof that Jesus had been sent from God, unless, as Peter asserts, he had been really "approved of God among them" by miraculous deeds. There was no weight in the prophecy adduced, and which they had not been accustomed to apply to the expected Messiah, except what it might obtain from the fact affirmed, the resurrection of Jesus. There was no proof of his exercising super-

natural power now, more than when he suffered on the cross, unless that power were actually witnessed in the gifts conferred on the Apostles. Was there no one in that numerous assembly who could refute the unexpected interpretation of an ancient prophecy given by an uneducated Galilean? No plain man of common sense, who could say, we heard of no "wonders, or signs, or mighty deeds"? No one who could account, in any ordinary way, for the use of various languages? Peter's speech depended for success entirely on the coincidence of actual fact with his arguments: here was nothing refined, nothing far-fetched, nothing to perplex the understanding of reasonable men; but his words came home to their consciences; and instead of putting down the Apostles with the hand of power as disturbers of a solemn assembly, they appeal to them as men and brethren, eagerly inquiring how they might atone for the crime in which they had been concerned. Yet it does not appear to have been one of those simultaneous impressions, which sometimes hurry away a multitude without reflection or in spite of reason. The historian does not say, that the conviction was unanimous. "They that gladly received his word were baptized:" which implies that some resisted arguments which proved effectual with the majority of that assembly.

Shortly after, this scene was repeated on a similar

occasion in Jerusalem.[1] Two of the Apostles performed a remarkable cure upon a cripple who was known in a regular station as beggar at the entrance of the temple. From the notoriety of the person, the miracle excited general astonishment. Again Peter addressed the multitude, in the same terms as at the feast of Pentecost. He declared the divine mission of Jesus: he asserted his resurrection: he affirmed that the miracle which they had just seen had been effected though his power. He again appealed to the prophets whose authority they professed to acknowledge, and adduced new passages in proof;[2] and he again concluded with inviting them to hear the call of God, first offered to their nation, and avert the punishment of their iniquities, by embracing the faith proposed to them.

Here, as before, the Apostle's words persuaded many of his hearers, who united themselves to the infant church.

But by this time the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus, and of his resurrection from the dead, had excited jealousy. If it was true, the chiefs of the state, who had procured his condemnation, were most deeply involved in guilt. Therefore the discourses of the Apostles were interrupted by authority: they were themselves imprisoned; and on the following day strict inquiry was made of them in full council, "by

[1] Acts iii. [2] Acts iii. 26.

what power or in what name" they had restored the cripple? The Apostles persevered in their declaration; affirmed that the cure which had occasioned such general surprise, had been performed through the power of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom the rulers had crucified, and God had raised from the dead; and that it behoved them all to acknowledge him, as they valued the salvation of their souls.[1]

Nothing can be more singular than the scene here delineated. On one part, the men in power, accustomed to command obedience, and the interpreters of the Mosaic law, whose authority had been paramount; these were now confronted by men of a despised district, silenced by quotations from their own Scriptures, and authoritatively taught what was essential to their salvation. We can readily comprehend their first impulse, to set down with a high hand these unknown and uneducated men: an impulse, however, which was restrained for a while by the presence of the man who had received the cure, which created a strong popular sensation: so that they could only venture, at this time, to stifle the business if possible, and forbid the new teachers to persist further in the doctrine which they were maintaining.

In defiance of this injunction, the Apostles declared that they had a divine command to promulgate these truths, and must continue to fulfil their mission.

[1] Acts iv.

And as the occasion did not allow of more open hostility, they were dismissed for the present with threats.

This warning, however, gave the Apostles good opportunity for deliberating on the nature of their undertaking. They now saw that their course was not a safe one; that they must look forward to opposition and suffering. There was still time to recede, if they chose to remain silent; but if they resolved to persevere, it could only be in defiance of authority, and at imminent personal risk. And what was their conduct? A solemn committal of their cause to God, whose agents they professed to be; and a devout entreaty that he would inspire them with holy courage, and support them with his power. "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings; and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus."[1]

It is not necessary to detail particularly the further progress of the Apostles. Opposition grew more violent, and the consequences of their undertaking were sufficiently seen. They nevertheless continued to teach the Gospel both publicly and privately; and the number of converts was so greatly multiplied within a few months, that it became

[1] Acts iv. 29—31.

necessary to appoint officers for the management of their temporal concerns.

At length persecution in Jerusalem drove the converts into the various cities of Asia, to which they conveyed their new faith: confining themselves at first to their own countrymen; but afterwards, induced by the hostility with which these opposed them, they proceeded to address Jews and Gentiles indiscriminately.

And this change of plan supplies incidental occasion for a remarkable feature of internal evidence in the different tone and language which is used by the same persons, now described as appealing to heathen nations. We possess two circumstantial records of their first discourse to such assemblies, which bear the strongest marks of the qualities most important to their credit, honesty, and common sense. Those who had fabricated a history, would be likely to tell it always in the same tone. The language of the Apostles varied with their circumstances. To the Jews, as we saw, they appealed to things acknowledged by themselves and their countrymen in common, and laboured mainly to establish the point, that the crucified Jesus was the expected Messiah. But between the heathen and themselves there were no books to which they could refer, as to the Jewish Scriptures, held in mutual reverence; and before they proceeded to the more immediate object, the divinity of Jesus, it was necessary to lay down as a

foundation the existence and the unity of God, and his concern with the actions of mankind. So at Lystra,[1] where a miraculous cure had drawn the attention of the multitudes, and induced them to offer such honours to Paul and Barnabas as they had been used to pay to the deities of their polytheism: the Apostles seize on this as the groundwork of their address, and say: We claim no such adoration; "we also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and all things that are therein: who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

If we treat the Apostles as impostors, we must account for this honesty and moderation; if as enthusiasts, for their prudent forbearance.

The behaviour of Paul at Athens is no less characteristic. He is said to have gone thither without any previous purpose of seeking proselytes; but as he was waiting for two companions whom he had appointed to join him there, "his spirit was stirred up within him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry."[2] I may seem to assume the fact of his

[1] Acts xiv. 8, &c.

[2] Acts xvii. 16, &c.

sincerity and earnestness; but surely this is a most accurate description of the feeling of a man conscious that he was in possession of an important truth, which all around him were in want of; and too anxious for the welfare of his fellow-creatures to pass by any opportunity of enlightening them. "Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoics, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection. And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears."

This passage affords a lively sketch of the Athenian agora and its frequenters, accustomed to perpetual discussions and agitating endless questions, with an utter indifference as to their truth or falsehood. Some entirely rejecting what they heard, "what will this babbler say?" Others struck with something imperfectly comprehended, and thinking it of sufficient consequence to be referred to the council of Areopagus.

We are next presented with the address of Paul to this assembly, opening with an ingenious allusion

to the altar inscribed, "To the unknown God;" and undertaking to set forth the Creator, who was at present strange to them, though convinced by their reason of the existence of some Supreme Being.

The condemnation of idolatry, and declaration of the truth which follows, is delivered in a tone of authority arising from the speaker's own confidence, which is beautifully blended with the compassion which he feels towards the ignorant and erring objects of his address. He speaks in that decisive strain of conscious superiority, which a Christian of the present day would adopt towards a tribe of Indians or Chinese. Yet who was the speaker? A stranger from an obscure province of Syria. Where was he speaking? In Athens, the instructress of the world. Whom was he addressing? The philosophers of highest repute in their age, to whom the wisest of other countries came for illumination.

He does not, however, launch at once into the mysteries of the faith which he professed. His mind is not so enthusiastically filled with the message of salvation which it was his office to convey, as to overlook the wisest method of imparting it. His object is, to prepare them to meet a future judgment: therefore he directs his blow towards their consciences and their fears. "The times of former ignorance God winked at; but now commands all men everywhere to repent; because he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteous-

ness by that Man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all, in that he hath raised him again from the dead."[1]

The effect of this novel declaration was the very effect to be anticipated from all that we know of human nature, and of that particular audience. When they found that his doctrine involved the question of the resurrection of the dead, a part ridiculed the idea: a part postponed the consideration of it; while some adhered to him, and "believed."[2]

[1] Acts xvii. 30, 31.

[2] He must have unusual confidence in the inventive powers of the early Christians, who can look upon these narratives, and the many others which are contained in the "Acts of the Apostles," as a mere fabrication: remembering, at the same time, the age to which the book indisputably belongs, and the persons by whom it must have been composed. When we consider the immense quantity of matter and the great variety of facts contained in it: the minute circumstances detailed: when we compare the speeches of Peter with those of Paul: and those of Paul to the Ephesians with those which he addressed to an unconverted audience: when we examine the conduct attributed to the Jews: their open persecution at Jerusalem, and their indirect accusation at Thessalonica; the ingenuity with which the adversaries of the Apostles address themselves to the passions and interests of men in the different cities: the characters of Gallio, of Felix, of Lysias, of Agrippa: it seems impossible to suppose this an invented narrative of things which never took place, or of persons who never had a real existence. This argument, indeed, can have no weight with a person who is not sensible of the air of truth and reality which pervades the whole history. But whoever is alive to this, whoever does perceive in almost every page the marks of a writer detailing the account of actual transactions and circumstances, should observe that the proof which arises from evidence of this kind, is not to be deemed far-fetched or imaginary, because it is incapable of being drawn out in words, or of being presented to the mind of the sceptic in any other way than by sending him to the books themselves.—See Paley's Horæ Paulinæ, Conclusion, p. 359.

Some believed. This is what requires explanation. How came any to give assent to such a fact as that affirmed by the Apostle, unless convincing evidence of his truth and divine commission were presented to them? What enabled Paul to prevail against that moral *vis inertiæ* which so strongly retains mankind in their accustomed habits and the opinions of their country, unless he really could bring forward the proofs to which he appealed? How came he to establish his ground, in defiance of opposition, not for want of it: for the history proves that both Jews and Gentiles were no less decidedly attached to the religion, the traditions, and the worship of their ancestors, than ourselves.

We have advanced thus far. We have shown that the first preachers of Christianity achieved a most arduous undertaking: and we have argued that such success affords strong presumption of their bearing about with them sufficient evidence of divine authority. Two questions, however, arise, which demand consideration.

On the supposition of the facts being true which form the basis of Christianity, was such miraculous interference to be expected as might effect the sure, though gradual establishment of the religion? And was it to be expected that on such authority their religion should be partially, not universally, received?

With regard to the first of these questions, we may surely reply, that there was ground to expect divine interposition. The reason has been already anticipated: nothing else would have obtained for the Apostles an attentive hearing. Supposing, therefore, what it is not unreasonable to suppose, considering the state of the moral world at the period in question, that God had devised a plan for its melioration: it is also probable that he would authenticate it by such visible interpositions of his power as are said to have accompanied the ministry of Jesus and his Apostles. Because we cannot conceive that, without some co-operation of this kind, their preaching would have obtained any permanent attention, much less that it would have effected what it did ultimately effect, the conversion of the civilized world.[1]

And this seems sufficient ground for believing, that if it were the purpose of God to establish a revelation like the Christian, he would see fit for a time to suspend or change the ordinary operations of his laws; and that in the case before us he actually did so.

[1] The cases of successful imposture or enthusiasm which sometimes astonish us, are no exception to this argument. Persons, such, for instance, as Swedenborg, do not introduce a new religion, but stand forward as interpreters of a religion before established on very different grounds; and because that is believed, they are listened to. If the religion were not already believed, these persons would gain no attention. The Apostles raised Christianity out of nothing, and against everything.

Here, however, an adversary steps in, and affirms that this exercise of miraculous power is too improbable to be credited on any testimony. It is contrary to the nature of the Deity, contrary to uniform experience, and refuted by the lessons of inductive philosophy, and, therefore, cannot be believed.

Whatever force may seem to be in this objection, a slight consideration will show that it carries us too far, and leads to consequences which a consistent Deist must hesitate to admit.

The argument stands thus. The laws of nature are fixed and uniform, being established by the Creator as the most suitable for the world he has made. To suppose that he would alter what he has once established, is to suppose mutability in his counsels, or imperfection in his laws. Therefore it is more probable that men should deceive or be deceived, than that he should have suffered that temporary change in the constitution of things which we call a miracle.

The most satisfactory answer to any abstract argument is that which can be drawn from matter of fact. In speaking of the Deity, more particularly, it is chiefly by considering what he has done, that we can safely decide what it may be consistent with his attributes to do. Have those writers who refuse to allow "any violation of the laws of matter, any modification in the existing condition of material agents, unless through the invariable operation of a series of

clearly expressed consequences, following in some necessary chain of orderly connexions"—have those writers ever seriously inquired of themselves how they account for the existence of those "material agents," and the "orderly connexion" which actually prevails? Because unless they adopt some of the ancient theories, and suppose the world to have been self-produced or eternal, they must allow that at some period, however distant or uncertain, a most important change did take place, that by a "modification of the pre-existing condition of material agents," that system was established under which we are now living. Whether it be termed *creation* or *production*, something was produced which did not exist before, or something before existing underwent important modification, unless we believe that our world had no Creator. And if we acknowledge a Creator, is it rational to suppose that when he gave to the world, as it now is, its form and being, he exhausted his Omnipotence, and reserved to himself no power of future interference; but said to the things that he had made, Such shall ye be, and no other?

It is not to do honour, as is pretended, to the wisdom of God, if we argue that it disparages his wisdom to suppose that he shall see reason to interfere with a system which he has himself ordained. Especially, when we take into consideration the object of

[1] Essays and Reviews, p. 133.

that interference. That which God saw fit to do for one purpose, he might see fit to do for another: for another, and not a less glorious purpose. For when we reflect on the difference which Christianity has already wrought in the moral world, and the still greater difference which it is calculated to work, and probably will effect in the progress of time, we cannot think it a less important exercise of power to have introduced the Gospel by suspending the laws which regulate the material world, than to have created the material world by first establishing them.

Unless, then, we banish from the universe the idea of God, and adopt some other principle to account for its existence, than its creation by a First Great Cause, we have no reason to believe it to be incompatible with the character of God to suspend the usual order of things.

Again, any argument must be founded on fallacy, which, if received, would render it impossible for God to reveal his will to mankind. But if there is justice in the assertion, that no testimony can warrant our belief in miracles, it is evident that we leave to God no assignable method of issuing any revelation. It would be rash to affirm absolutely that there could be no other method. Yet it is difficult to conceive in what other way could a messenger sent by him prove the authority of his mission. As was shown just now, who would believe a messenger on his mere

affirmation? We naturally demand such an authentication, as the question attributed to the Jews requires, "What sign showest thou?"[1] Men may be constrained to profess belief, and embrace a religion, as they were by the sword of Mohammed and his successors; but they cannot be persuaded and convinced, except by some evidence which appeals to their reason, and satisfies their understanding.

It is further to be remarked, that before we decide so positively concerning the order of nature, the phenomena of the Jewish history must be taken into consideration. The wonders which are said to have attested the mission of Jesus and his Apostles took place among a people whose records contained repeated accounts of similar interference; and who were accustomed to consider such signs as part of a system which God had established in order to preserve in their nation a belief in the Creator, and a knowledge of his will. Either the whole Jewish history must be given up as false, which would only shift our difficulty, without removing it; or the Christian miracles form the last of a series of interpositions which God had constantly exercised with regard to that people. In this case they do not indicate the change, but the completion, of an uniform and regular scheme: a scheme which had been devised and kept in view from the beginning of things,

[1] John ii. 18.

and gradually brought to its accomplishment by the incarnation of Jesus: a plan which was shadowed out in a national law which had been observed for fifteen centuries; a plan which is intimated in the writings of numerous authors spread over the surface of that long period; writings abounding with passages that received their first and only explanation in the character and history of Jesus.

Therefore, to the employment of miracles, as a part of the divine government, the whole Jewish people bear witness. Not merely the people of one age, but of a series of ages. Miracles made them what they were, an exception to the general state of the world, in religion, in laws, in customs, in morals. And experience like this has a claim to be considered, when we talk of experience, and draw our conclusions. We are not at liberty to assert that miracles are contrary to all experience, when the experience of a whole nation attests them, and when that attestation is confirmed by phenomena which, except on the supposition of miracles, we have no means of explaining.

The purport of the foregoing reflections is, not to prove the truth of the miracles related in the narratives of the Apostles, which belongs to a different course of argument; but to dispose the mind to receive that external evidence which does confirm them; and which establishes the divinity of Jesus from the miracles which he wrought, and enabled

his followers to work. The idea must not be rejected as incredible, that the Apostles were endued with the faculty of speaking various languages for the purpose of communicating instruction, which otherwise could never have been imparted; or that they were supernaturally enabled to conciliate attention and favour by acts of mercy and of power. On the contrary, it appears probable, that if the religion were really divine, they would have been entrusted with such gifts. Because without them, they would in vain have attempted to withdraw the Jews from their ritual, or the heathen from their idolatry.[1] It savours of atheism to exclude God from all concern with the world, of which he is acknowledged to be the Creator. True, we do not now experience his interposition. Neither do we perceive it in the direction of the natural world. But he did interpose in the natural world, when he

[1] The difficulties which the first teachers of Christianity would have universally to encounter, are well set forth by Dr. Hey, b. i. ch. xviii. s. 6. "Nothing less than being present at the different scenes which attended the propagation of Christianity, would give us a perfect conception of this interesting subject. We should see the magnificence of the heathen temples, the fine workmanship of the statues, the priests, the victims, superbly adorned, the attendant youths of both sexes, &c. &c.; we should observe how every part of religion was contrived to allure and captivate; we should see how all men were attached to it, not only of the lower ranks, but the most improved and the best informed: for we, in our improved times, are apt to think Jupiter, Apollo, and Venus, so absurd as deities, that we have no idea or feeling of the attachment of the heathens to their gods."

established that order of things which we call the laws of nature. And so in respect of religion. He manifested himself openly till he had completed the full revelation of his will, and now leaves that revelation to work its effect upon the world without the further operation of his visible power.

2. The second question alluded to, as an argument against the reality of the Christian miracles, still remains to be noticed; the inflexible obstinacy of the ruling party among the Jews, and, indeed, of the great mass of the nation. Was it to be expected, that in the face of such evidence there should be any unbelief? that the religion should be only partially received? Who could withhold assent, when the most astonishing miracles were exhibited before their eyes?

In reply to this, we should observe, that it is an error to set the Christians against the Jews, and the Jews against the Christians, as a body. The preaching of the Apostles made the Jews a divided body; and the majority of the earliest Christians were, in fact, converted Jews. The conversion of one part removes the objection arising from the obduracy of the other. For what account can be given of that conversion, if the whole history is untrue? Whereas the unbelief of the greater number is sufficiently explained on the known principles of human nature.

We need not go far for an exemplification. We look around, and see a community calling itself Christian; and though a few may confess their scepticism, the majority would indignantly repel the insinuation that they disbelieve the Gospel. Yet how few, how very few, comparatively, act in consistency with their profession, or live conformably with the Christian faith? Not because they are convinced that it does not deserve to be believed, but because it interferes with their pleasures, or their habits, or their prejudices, and therefore they pass it over with a notice too inconsiderable to be acted upon. On similar grounds it is easy to understand the conduct of the Jews. When we remember the confession of personal guilt, which their acknowledgment of Jesus as the Messiah must have implied: the complete sacrifice of worldly advantages which it required: the prejudices to be renounced; the passions to be overcome; and further, when we add to this the obligations which it would have imposed upon them, the change of personal conduct which it demanded, to which they had the same repugnance as all other men; we shall perceive, I think, that national confession would have been an act of national repentance little to be expected from their character as a people, or from the nature of mankind in general.

Where there is a strong indisposition to believe,

pretexts for not believing are readily discovered. The history of Jesus acquaints us that the persons in authority drew the attention of their countrymen from the miracles on pretence of their being wrought through the agency of evil spirits. The prejudices of some rendered them unwilling to receive him as the Messiah; the habits of others disinclined them to listen to his doctrines; and this set them upon seeking for an explanation of the supernatural power, which they could not but acknowledge. They found one, which, however frivolous it may appear to us, at least gives the opinion of that age and nation. This solution was as satisfactory to them as that of magic to those among the heathen, who paid sufficient attention to the Christian story to know what it contained. The early apologists themselves assure us, that this consideration prevented them from alleging the miracles of Jesus as their strongest argument:[1] they laid far greater stress upon the prophecies; and their choice in this matter, however unwise it may appear to us, seems justified by the ease with which Celsus thinks that he has disposed of all difficulty, when he has attributed the Christian miracles to a skilful use of magic.[2] People are easily satisfied when they are willing to

[1] Justin Mart. Apol. i. ch. xxxvii.

[2] See, on this subject, Watson's Letters to Gibbon, page 147, &c.

be deceived; and a vague reference to such an explanation, though quite as insufficient to an honest inquirer then, as the plea of witchcraft to an enlightened philosopher now, might be enough to divert attention, and resist the first weak impressions of conscientious conviction. Particularly when a powerful array of immediate interests opposed the strength of evidence, and fortified the prejudices naturally entertained by the votaries and priests of an expiring religion.[1]

The case of Paul illustrates these remarks. Without assuming that he was convinced by a miracle immediately affecting himself, we may argue that he was convinced, and from an enemy became a zealous partisan; from a Jewish persecutor a Christian confessor. Long after his conversion he speaks indirectly of the state of mind under which he had acted; which was no other than that foretold by Jesus, when men should go about to slay his disciples, and think that they were "doing God service."[2] He "did it ignorantly, in unbelief;" that is, he was so blinded by prejudice that he could

[1] Much more might be said upon these points; but the question has been so fully and so ably treated, both by Paley and Chalmers, that no reader, I imagine, can require further satisfaction than he may meet with in those writers, respecting either the neglect of the heathen philosophers, or the unbelief of the Jews.—See Paley, Part iii. ch. iv.; Chalmers's Evid. ch. v.

[2] 1 Tim. i. 13.

not discern the truth; and though he had become too well instructed to think such prejudice innocent, he attributes it to this cause, that God had mercifully pardoned and enlightened him.

We must not, at any rate, allow an objection to divert our minds from the undisputed fact, that a considerable body of the Jewish nation was persuaded to exchange the religion to which they had been attached with proverbial zeal, for a religion which opposed all their sentiments, disappointed all their expectations, and compromised all their exclusive privileges. Now, from our experience of the human mind, we can in some measure understand how a part of the nation might obstinately resist evidence which convinced the rest: but on no experience whatever can we understand how a single individual should have been converted, without that very evidence to which their conversion is ascribed in the history. And the result of the whole is, that, in the account which we have received of the first propagation of Christianity, there is nothing inconsistent with what we know of the human heart, its prejudices, associations, and tendencies;—supposing that the facts were true; supposing that such a person as Jesus had been really foretold by a series of prophets; supposing that he had indeed risen from the dead; and supposing that the miracles appealed to had been actually performed. On any

other supposition the whole case becomes altogether inexplicable, and the progress of the religion a problem without parallel in the history of mankind.

CHAPTER XI.

MORAL CHANGE EFFECTED BY CHRISTIANITY.

It has been urged in the preceding chapter, that the history contained in the book of the Acts of the Apostles gives a probable account of the promulgation of Christianity.

Such a report, without doubt, comes attended by suspicion. The report of those whose veracity is the very matter in question, cannot be received without scruple. But whether we receive their account or not, here is a tangible and acknowledged fact, of which some explanation must be given. There is an edifice existing before our eyes. We may disbelieve the current records of its foundation, but it must have had some builder; and there is no philosophy in refusing to admit the alleged history of its erection, unless we can supply another, which is better authenticated or more probable.

This edifice is Christianity. The witnesses to its foundation are the Christians, who, eighteen centuries ago, appeared in the world. If these did not become Christians through indisputable evidence of

the divine origin of their religion, how did they become so? What was the occasion of that extraordinary change, that moral revolution, which took place, when the native of Asia, or Greece, or Italy, confessed himself a Christian?

What the morals of the world were, at the period when Christianity was first preached, we know from unquestionable authority. We know that the only divine worship practised at all was idolatrous worship; and that this idolatrous worship was commonly attended with profligacy of the most debasing kind, and often with heinous cruelty. We know that no restraint was laid upon the evil passions of our nature, except by public laws and public opinion. But public laws never did or can extend to many of the worst vices; and public opinion, judging from experience, in order that it may become an efficient corrective of vicious passions, requires a higher standard of reference than human nature ever supplied. I have no desire to disparage the characters of those who used to the best purpose the light which they possessed, and exalted the age in which they lived by noble exhibitions of temperance, probity, disinterestedness, or fortitude. Nor have I any wish to derogate from the honour of those philosophers who employed their reason to its noblest purpose; and, in some instances, endeavoured to raise their followers above the dominion of selfish appetite or worldly ambition. It is enough

to know, as we do know, what the Asiatic, and Greek, and Roman world was, in spite of individual exceptions, and in defiance of the exertions of philosophy. Wickedness, indeed, will take the same course, and bear in many points the same aspect in every age. But with the heathen world, taken collectively, habits of life were allowed and uncensured, which we are accustomed to consider as proof that the restraints are thrown aside by which the rest of the community is bound. Even their moralists appear as libertines, when tried by the standard of the Gospel.[1] Nor did the world give any signs of melioration, or progressive improvement. In all those points which form the real distinction between vice and virtue, Athens and Lacedæmon were no better than Sardis or Babylon; and imperial Rome had no superiority over the Grecian democracies which it supplanted. Thales, Pythagoras, Solon, Socrates, Cicero, had effected no general change, either in the theory of religion or the practice of morals.

On a sudden, in the midst of idolatry, or of utter carelessness as to all religion, and in the midst of selfish gratifications and sensual indulgences with which they were still on every side surrounded,

[1] On this subject it is sufficient to refer to Leland's excellent work, on the "Advantage of Revelation;" and to Macknight's "Truth of the Gospel History." Cicero, Orat. pro Cælio, c. 20; Epictet. Enchirid. c. 47; Porphyry (ap. Cyrill. contr. Julian. i. 6. p. 186); abundantly justify the remark in the text.

there grew up in Italy, and in the principal cities of Greece and of Asia, parties of men, more or less numerous, who professed a way of life entirely new, both in practice and in principle.[1] Renouncing the idols and imaginary deities which they had been educated to worship, they acknowledged one Almighty Creator and Governor of the world, as revealed to them by his Son, "the man Christ Jesus." Removed alike from the ignorant thoughtlessness of the vulgar, and the sceptical hesitation of the philosophers, they believed in the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, and a state of future retribution. Stedfastly relying on this expectation, they treated with indifference the honours and gratifications of the present life; and, for the sake of future reward, cultivated a character unknown before, and now that it became known, often despised, and seldom much esteemed—a character, of which the conspicuous features are piety, humility, charity, purity, and moderation.

And the persons who entered upon this new course of life were not persons whose previous habits rendered them more likely to embrace it than their neighbours, whose society they left.

[1] Suetonius, the writers of the Augustan History, Lucian, Apuleius, Athenæus, to say nothing of the Roman satirists, may acquaint us what the state of the world was, in which the purity of Christian morals had to make its way. And in the midst of the general corruption, Alexandria, Antioch, Corinth, and the cities of Ionia and Asia Minor were especially notorious.

They are spoken of—nay, they are personally addressed—as having been brought from darkness to light, with respect to habits as well as principles. Paul, in his Epistle to the Corinthians, after enumerating some of the worst vices of our nature, and those to which we know from history that the Corinthians were particularly exposed, goes on to say, "Such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."[1] He says the same, in effect, to the converts from Colosse, Ephesus, and Rome; and insinuates it universally; with the intent, we might suppose, of magnifying the extent of his conquests, if his object had not been evidently to exhort, and not to prove a point; and if we had not collateral evidence of the greatness of the change. So great a change, indeed, that it is commonly expressed by the strongest imaginable comparisons; and is represented as a new birth, a new creation. Neither will these figures be deemed overstrained by those who have a clear historical acquaintance with the state of that world out of which the first Christians were taken; and those who have not such acquaintance, are necessarily without one of the most striking proofs of the divine origin of our religion.[2] The Moham-

[1] 1 Cor. vi. 11.

[2] No evidence is more likely to prove convincing to a classical scholar than Justin Martyr's "Apologies." Let him consider

medan and the Christian are daily now, in common language, set in opposition to each other. Yet a Mohammedan and a Christian may be considered as brothers in opinion, compared with a Gentile before and after his conversion to the Gospel. The perplexities and inconsistencies of the best philosophy; the gross ignorance of the mass of mankind; the depraved habits of all, form a contrast so remarkable to the clear views, the authoritative tone, and the purity of the Gospel, that we seem to have been suddenly conveyed from an opposite hemisphere, and to emerge in a moment from darkness to light.

It was shown formerly, that the doctrines and principles from which the Christian character derives its vigour, had no origin, as far as we know, in the opinions which prevailed before in the world among the inhabitants of any country. But the evidence arising from the originality of the doctrines would be comparatively slight, if Christianity were a mere collection of speculative principles. Men, whose attention is mainly given to other concerns, may acquiesce in certain philosophical or theological opinions with an indifference which renders their profession a very inadequate test of the truth or falsehood of those opinions. Henry the Fourth of

the date, about 110 years after the death of Christ (indisputable, from the address to Antoninus Pius); the history and native country of the author; and let him compare the sentiments, morals, and principles which he finds there with all he ever read of classical antiquity.

France renounced the Protestant faith. But that renunciation, under all its circumstances, contributed nothing in favour of the religion which he adopted. Again, when the Protestant religion was finally established in England, and only two hundred of the Roman Catholic priesthood, so bigoted under Mary, resigned their benefices for conscience' sake, we cannot allege this as any proof of the soundness of the Protestant cause.[1] Such abjuration or profession only shows the indifference or want of principle of those concerned.

But the case is very different with the first converts to Christianity. The principles which they embraced made an entire change in their habits of life. The doctrines which they professed were doctrines to be acted upon. And the strongest evidence, after all, that those doctrines deserve to be believed, is that they were acted upon; acted upon by numerous bodies of men in different countries; were received as ruling principles of life and conduct: as principles of sufficient weight to overcome previous habits, and to superinduce contrary habits; to defy all opposition during life, and to be maintained triumphantly in death. For to preach the Gospel, as the Apostles preached it, was not to persuade a man who had maintained the extinction of the soul at the dissolution of the body, to acquiesce

[1] Burnet's Hist. of the Reformation, b. iv. Fuller's Church History, b. ix.

in arguments for its immortality; — it was not to convince a disciple of Epicurus that the prospective contrivances and admirable adaptation of the several parts of the universe prove an intelligent contriver; —but it was to persuade those who had believed themselves subject to no law except that of the state, to acknowledge a heavenly Governor; to submit to a code of unusual strictness and purity; to renounce sensual indulgences which they had been accustomed to consider innocent: to give up habits of life which had been familiar to them from their youth, and adopt a new course on principles entirely different.

This would not be done, by whole bodies of men, on a doubtful speculation, or out of a rash love of novel doctrines. It was not the sort of "new thing" for which the sophists of Athens were always on the watch.[1] It is what we cannot imagine any persons to consent to do, without some overruling motive, or without irresistible conviction.

The first converts of those who preached Christianity were taken from among their own countrymen. These they persuaded to renounce their dependence on the law of Moses; to change the whole nature of their religious worship; to resign a pretension to the exclusive favour of the Deity, an inheritance bequeathed to them from their ancestors, which they had boasted of during fifteen hundred years;

[1] Acts xvii. 21.

insomuch that those who had been proverbial for their enmity to all other nations, now set out on a pilgrimage to convert them.

Their success in this attempt was still more extraordinary. The existence of such characters as Peter, or John, or Paul, appearing suddenly among their Jewish brethren, is a phenomenon which requires to be accounted for; but stranger still is the case of Jason or Dionysius in Greece,[1] of Philemon or Polycarp in Asia, of Clement at Rome. Or still more, of the bodies of men taught and governed by these, and such as these; and to whom the apostolic epistles were addressed.

This which follows, for example, is the account given by Clement writing from Rome, of the society of Christians which he had visited and seen at Corinth.

"Who that has ever been among you has not experienced the stedfastness of your faith, fruitful in all good works, and admired the temper and moderation of your religion in Christ? Ye were all of you humble-minded, desiring rather to be subject than to govern, to give than to receive, being content with the portion God had dispensed to you; and hearkening diligently to his word, ye received it into your hearts, having his precepts always before your eyes. Thus a firm and blessed and profitable peace was given unto you; and an insatiable desire

[1] Acts xvii. 5—34.

of doing good; and a plentiful effusion of the Holy Ghost was upon all of you. And being full of good desires, ye did with a great readiness, and with a religious confidence, stretch forth your hands to God Almighty; beseeching him to be merciful unto you, if in anything ye had unwillingly sinned against him. Ye were sincere and without offence towards each other; not mindful of injuries; all sedition and schism were abomination to you. Ye bewailed every one his neighbours' sins, esteeming their defects your own. Ye were kind one to another without grudging; being ready to every good work. And being thus adorned with a conversation altogether virtuous and religious, ye did all things in the fear of God, whose commandments were written upon the tables of your hearts.[1]

Now let it be understood, that less than thirty years before, Paul had founded the church at Corinth, of which this is a description.[2] As a preliminary, the Corinthians were to be persuaded that the deities which they and their ancestors had worshipped were no gods, but the fictions of poetry or dreams of ignorance. That there was one invisible Creator, who took cognizance of human actions, and would reward those who obeyed and punish those who disobeyed him, in another state of eternal existence. That they had individually incurred his wrath and deserved his

[1] Clem. Ep. ad Corinth. i. s. 1 and 2.

[2] Clement's Epistle, A.D. about 80. Paul's first Epistle about 55.

punishment; but that he had sent his Son into the world, in the human form and nature, to redeem from that punishment as many as should trust in him, and receive the mysteries belonging to his incarnation. Further, that those who do trust in him, and profess his religion, must be a holy people; pure in heart, pure in practice, renouncing all dishonesty, all impurity, all malice; devoting their lives to the service of God; and seeking his Holy Spirit by faith and prayer, that they may be enabled to effect this, and become such characters as Clements describes them.

This is a slight sketch of the doctrines which Paul taught, and according to which the Corinthians are said by Clement to have directed their lives. Can anything persuade us that these persons would have confessed what they were led to confess, or have renounced what this religion bound them to renounce, or have practised what they did practise, on Paul's exhortation, unless he carried with him indisputable proofs of a divine commission? Would any common argument have induced men to model their lives anew after precepts such as these: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth; but in heaven: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." "Look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth." "So when Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

Neither is it any contradiction to the force of this fact, that it was a principle with some of the ancient philosophers to despise the honours and dignities of the world. There is a wide difference between Cynical or Stoic apathy, and Christian patience and self-denial. The motive characterizes and distinguishes them. We need not be severe to mark those few, those very few, who were led by reflection on the capabilities of their nature, or on the uncertainties of life and fortune, or by any consideration derived from their own reason, to despise the vanities around them, and look into their own minds for happiness. But they acted on a calculation of which this world was the object and boundary. Contempt of the present world, arising from a confidence of future recompense, it would be hard to find in a single passage of heathen antiquity; much less is it the characteristic of a numerous party scattered over the remotest districts, and consisting in great measure of those classes of society which philosophy never deigned to look upon. The Stoic refused the good things of this world (if indeed he ever did refuse them) because they might be taken from him, or because they ended in dissatisfaction, or because his taste led another way

but these men were indifferent towards temporal things on higher grounds: they had not leisure for them, and could serve God better without them: they had too much to effect in too short a time, to allow any unnecessary delays or deviations. Such had been Paul's injunction: "This I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away."[1] In the same spirit writes the Roman Clement: "Take heed, beloved, that God's many blessings be not our condemnation, unless we walk worthy of him, doing with one consent what is good and pleasing in his sight."[2] And the Asiatic Polycarp: "I exhort all of you, that ye obey the word of righteousness, and exercise patience, which ye have seen displayed before your eyes, not only in the blessed Ignatius, and Zosimus, and Rufus, but in others that have been among you; and in Paul himself, and the rest of the Apostles. Being confident of this, that all these have not run in vain, but in faith and righteousness; and are gone to the place which was due to them from the Lord: with whom also they suffered. For they loved not

[1] 1 Cor. vii. 29—32. [2] Epist. i. s. 21.

this present world, but him who died, and was raised again by God for us." [1]

Justin Martyr did not hesitate publicly to assert this as the character of the party to which he belonged. "Being inflamed," he says, "with the desire of a pure and an eternal life, we aspire after an intimate converse with God, the great Father and Creator of the world; and are eager to seal our confession with our blood; being certainly persuaded that they shall attain this state, who, by their conduct, study to approve themselves to God, as seeking him, and earnestly desiring communion with him in that life, where no malice or wickedness shall exist." [2]

In another passage, occurring in a private letter, the author compares Christians, dwelling in this world, to the soul dwelling in the body: reasoning, that, "as the soul lives *in* the body, but is not *of* the body, so Christians dwell in the world, but are not of the world; an immortal spirit dwells in a mortal tabernacle; and Christians, while they sojourn in these corruptible mansions, expect and look forward to an incorruptible estate in heaven." [3] Indeed, Justin complains that among the reproaches urged against them, they were blamed because "having, from a vain belief, chosen Christ to be their Master, they, for his sake, undervalued and threw away all

[1] Polyc. Epist. s. ix. [2] Just. Mart. Apol. I. s. 8.
[3] Ep. ad Diognet., erroneously ascribed to Justin.

the enjoyments and advantages of the present time."[1] And it was currently assigned as one reason why the Christians were trained up to despise the pleasures and amusements of this life, "that they might be more willing to die; that the cords being severed by which they were fastened to this world, they might be more active and ready for their departure out of it."[2]

No one will deny, that before the mind can be brought to such a state as this, it must be strongly biassed from its natural inclination. The force must have been extraordinary, which could in so great a degree counteract the power of immediate impressions.

Unquestionably, the prospect of eternal happiness is calculated to raise and animate the best hopes of human nature; and being confidently entertained, is more than equal to the effects above described. But when a present sacrifice is demanded, and definite qualifications are to be laboriously acquired, the prospect must be unexceptionably assured before things seen and temporal are resigned for things unseen and eternal.[3] Let a stranger come with the

[1] Just. Dial. cum Tryphone. [2] Tertull. de Spect. c. 1.

[3] The misrepresentations of Gibbon put this out of sight, and would seem to imply that no sacrifice was required. "When the promise of eternal happiness was proposed to mankind, on condition of adopting the faith and of observing the precepts of the Gospel, it is no wonder that so advantageous an offer should have been accepted by great numbers of every religion, of every rank, of every province."

offer of a noble estate, to revert to us after a certain period. We have no hesitation in closing with so generous an offer. But when we proceed to learn that this estate is in a distant country; and when he annexes as a condition of our enjoying it, that we acquire the language of that country, and the manners of its inhabitants, and devote our whole attention during the intermediate term to what may fit us for living in this foreign land, the case is widely altered; we begin to inquire, Is it certain that there is such a country? has this stranger unlimited power in it? are his offers to be trusted without scruple? And even if all this were proved to our entire satisfaction, how seldom would the present sacrifice be submitted to, as it was by the primitive Christians? For certainly those who first embraced the religion of Jesus had no notion of a gratuitous offer of eternal happiness. They had no doubt but the promises were annexed to certain qualifications; for they devoted their hearts and lives to the cultivation of virtues which, if not necessary to the purpose for which they were avowedly pursued, were of little value in this world to their possessors. As Clement represents the Corinthians: "Ye were all of you humble-minded; desiring rather to be subject than to govern; to give than to receive."[1] Another thus describes his fellow-Christians: "Amongst us there is no affectation of vain-glory; but separating ourselves from

[1] Ep. i. s. 2.

all common and earthly thoughts and discourses, and having surrendered ourselves to be governed by the laws of God, we abandon whatever is any way connected with human fame."[1] When the female martyr Agatha was upbraided because, being descended of an illustrious parentage, she stooped to mean and humble offices, "Our nobility," she replied, "lies in this, that we are the servants of Christ." Not to dwell on individual instances, the great body of primitive Christians carried their moderation of appetites so far, as to protest against the common use of wine; as to condemn all second marriages as little better than adultery; as often to refuse marriage altogether; as to inflict severe censures upon all who yielded to sinful temptation; as to proscribe theatres and shows, and to avoid, if possible, any mixed assemblies; so that a Christian might be known, in private, by his fastings; in public, by his temperance; and universally, by simplicity and plainness of dress, and by a subdued and humble countenance and deportment.[2] We may be of opinion that they carried this austerity too far; that is not now the question: I only argue, that they did not assume to themselves the offer of salvation as gratuitous or unconditional; and that they would not have sought it on such conditions as these, without sure conviction that the offer was well guaran-

[1] Tatian contr. Gra. p. 167.

[2] See Cave's Primitive Christianity, Part 2, *passim*.

teed. For it must be observed, that I have not been exhibiting their rules, but their practice. Rules may be very strict, while practice is very lax; but I have been citing description, not exhortation; description of those who dreaded all temptation to evil from a sense of its danger, and avoided all appearance of evil from a consciousness of the strong engagements by which they were bound. It was a known fact, that they reckoned themselves obliged, by the vows which they had undertaken at their baptism, to abstain from public shows and theatrical exhibitions: it was a part of their discipline not to admit a stage player to communion; and as for the accusations of their enemies, the worst that Pliny, after a solemn and not very friendly inquiry, could discover against them, was, that they were accustomed on a stated day to meet before the dawn, and to repeat among themselves a hymn to Christ as God, and to bind themselves by an oath to abstain from all wickedness; to be guilty of no thefts, robberies, or adulteries; to violate no promise and deny no pledge.[1] Near a century afterwards, Tertullian could openly assert, that very few Christians had suffered by the hand of the executioner, except on account of their religion.

Let us take their character as pourtrayed by the hand of an author who had studied it well, yet with

[1] Epist. lib. x. xcvii.

no prepossession in its favour. "Their serious and sequestered life," he says, "averse to the gay luxury of the age, inured them to chastity, temperance, economy, and all the sober and domestic virtues. As the greater number were of some trade or profession, it was incumbent on them, by the strictest integrity, and the fairest dealing, to remove the suspicions which the profane are too apt to conceive against the appearances of sanctity. The contempt of the world exercised them in habits of humility, meekness, and patience. Even their faults, or rather errors, were derived from an excess of virtue. Ambitious to exalt the perfection of the Gospel above the wisdom of philosophy, the zealous fathers carried the duties of self-mortification, of purity, and of patience, to a height which it is scarcely possible to attain, and much less to preserve, in our present state of weakness and corruption. They despised all knowledge that was not useful to salvation, and considered all levity of discourse as a criminal abuse of the gift of speech. The candidate for heaven was instructed not only to resist the grosser allurements of taste or smell, but even to shut his ears against the profane harmony of sounds, and to view with indifference the most finished productions of human art; gay apparel, magnificent houses, and elegant furniture, were supposed to unite the double guilt of pride and sensuality. A simple and mortified appearance was more suitable to the Christian, who

was certain of his sins, and doubtful of his salvation."[1]

This is the description of persons separated from the rest of the world by a decided line; and they must have been well satisfied of the grounds on which they were acting before they consented to a separation of a nature so uninviting. Neither can their strictness be explained away, as the natural result of their separation. Allow it to be true, that any particular society having departed from the great body of the nation, or the religion to which it belonged, immediately becomes the object of universal as well as invidious observation: allow it to be true, that this feeling, together with the desire of gaining proselytes, engaged every member of this new community to watch with the most vigilant attention over his own behaviour, and that of his brethren: the problem is, not the austerity, but the formation of this small society. They first became a sect, and then practised austerity. An anxious wish to increase their number must be felt by all true Christians equally, because they desire to extend as widely as possible those privileges of which they personally feel the value. But it is extraordinary that those of whom we are speaking took measures with regard to the admission of members which would seem likely to deter proselytes, rather than

[1] Gibbon, ch. xv.

allure them. The candidates for baptism underwent a long and strict probation, under the title of catechumens. It was not enough to profess themselves convinced of the truth of the Christian doctrine; they were required to pledge themselves to live according to its precepts; they were directed to perform a solemn exercise of prayer and fasting for the forgiveness of past sins; and their lives and behaviour, during the time that they had been subject to Christian instruction, were closely inquired into.[1] Before the ceremony was performed, they publicly renounced sin, and all the pomps and pleasures of the world. This was the conduct of men who were in earnest as to the value of what they professed, but not of men who wanted proselytes for the sake of a party. In fact, they absolutely refused baptism, not only to the members of scandalous vocations, but to those who were exposed by their callings to visible danger of temptation.[2] And further, they excluded from their society, and from the pale of the church, those who were guilty of any known offence against the Christian law; and thus rendered the conditions of remaining within the church no less strict, than those of admission into it.

The consequence was, that the Christians, when accused by their enemies, could confidently appeal

[1] Justin Martyr, Apol. i. p. 70.—Origen, contr. Cels. l. iii. p. 50.—Ambr. de Sacram. l. i. c. 2.

[2] See Apostol. Constit. l. viii. c. 32, &c. Bingham's Antiqu. xi. 5.

to their lives as proofs of the excellence of their doctrine: could affirm that their societies, when compared with those around them, shone like lights in the world: could point to their converts, and contrast what they once were, with what they had become.[1]

"Inquire," says Origen, "into the lives of some amongst us; compare our former and our present course of life, and you will find in what impieties and impurities men were involved before they embraced our doctrines. But since they embraced them, how just, grave, moderate, and resolute are they become. Nay, some are so inflamed with the love of purity and holiness, as to abstain even from legitimate gratifications. The church abounds with such men, wherever the doctrines of Christianity are received."[2]

"Give me," says Lactantius, "a man that is angry, furious, and passionate; and with a few words from God, I will render him as meek and quiet as a lamb: give me one that has lived in vice and sensuality, and you shall see him sober, chaste, and temperate. So great," he adds, "is the power of divine wisdom, that being infused into the breast it will soon expel that folly which is the parent of all vice and wickedness."[3] Still earlier Justin Martyr writes, "We, who formerly valued our estates and posses-

[1] Origen, contr. Cels. l. iii. 128. [2] Origen, contr. Cels. l. i.
[3] Lib. iii. de Falsa Sapient. c. 26.

sions above all things else, now put them into a common stock, and distribute to those that are in need. We, who formerly delighted in adultery, now observe the strictest chastity. We, who practised magical charms, now devote ourselves to the true God. We, who once hated each other, and delighted in mutual quarrel and bloodshed, and according to custom refused to sit at the same fire with those who were not of our own tribe and party: now, since the appearance of Christ in the world, live familiarly with them, pray for our enemies, and endeavour to persuade those that hate us without a cause to direct their lives according to the excellent precepts of Christ; that so they may have reasonable hope to obtain a share in our rewards from the great Lord and Judge of all things."[1]

Such is the description of those who first appeared as Christians. And are we not bound in some way or other to account for their appearance? Is it so natural for man to lay aside former habits of vice, and assume the opposite habits of virtue? Is it common to give up old companions; to resign amusements which we have been taught to value, and gratifications which we have been accustomed to indulge? To join a new party, a proscribed, unfashionable party?

This is a question which every one may answer

[1] Apol. ii. p. 61.

from his own experience. True communion with the Christian church is the same in all ages. Whoever embraces the Gospel with any hope of profiting by its profession, must live in all essentials as these first converts lived, and become what they were. If the reader of these pages is so living, he will probably acknowledge that he was only induced to enter on such a course of life by a most decided conviction of its necessity, and of the danger of living otherwise. If he has neither the faith nor the habits of these primitive converts, he is equally well able to judge of the resistance opposed by human nature to a change like that which has been described. He can answer, whether a slight argument, or any except the most irresistible testimony, can induce him to confess the Christian's faith, or conform to the strictness of scriptural Christianity. And why should he assume that men were different seventeen or eighteen centuries ago, and ready to do that on insufficient evidence, which no evidence can persuade him to attempt? What can we argue from with more certainty, than the acknowledged and visible character of human nature?

It would be good, if all those who may demur with regard to the difficulty of changing the moral habits of a community, or of forming a sect which should walk "by faith and not by sight," and prefer things eternal to things temporal, would try the experiment, and see how much it costs to convert a single

individual. There are few who have not among their acquaintance some who are living in habits inconsistent with the Gospel, and which must exclude them, if persevered in, from the hopes of the Gospel. Let them try to reclaim these acquaintances, by setting before them the threatenings and the promises of God, the offer of mercy brought by his Son Jesus, and all those truths which had such powerful effects in Greece and Asia. We would not say that they may not prevail: it is an attempt which is constantly making, and not unfrequently successful; but this we may safely affirm, that those who try it, will not pretend that they have had an easy conquest; and that those who are persuaded, will allow that no trifling victory has been gained over them. And this in a country where Christianity is supported by all the external advantages which long establishment, national profession, zealous and learned ministers, and multitudes of sincere believers can supply.

And if such are the difficulties in the midst of such advantages—for the strength of which I appeal to every man's own heart—what prospect of success would Paul have had, humanly speaking, in Corinth, or Ephesus, or Rome, or any heathen city? From Judea—his country, hardly known—if known, proverbially despised; denouncing idols in the centre of idolatry; proscribing the pleasures of this world in the midst of wealth, and vanity, and luxury;

preaching the care of the soul to those who denied its immortality; inculcating the fear of God to those who were ignorant of his existence; or, if they acknowledged a Supreme Being, denied his moral government. When would he have made a single convert, if he had stood on no firmer basis than his own opinion, or his own assertion?

Yet it was under these most unfavourable circumstances that a body of men sprung up, and increased, and diffused themselves, professing such original and austere doctrines; it was in the midst of luxury, and thoughtlessness, and ignorance, and idolatry, and depravity, that a system of pure, and self-denying, and enlightened, and vigilant piety was planted, and rooted, and flourished, and brought forth abundant fruit, and, spreading far and wide, received under its shelter a continually increasing multitude. "A pure and humble religion gently insinuated itself into the minds of men, grew up in silence and obscurity, derived new vigour from opposition, and finally erected the triumphant banner of the Cross on the ruins of the Capitol. Still farther, after a revolution of thirteen or fourteen centuries, that religion is still professed by the nations of Europe; the most distinguished portion of human kind, in arts and learning as well as in arms."[1] Either this religion was the invention of some obscure individuals in that very country of the world which any

[1] Gibbon.

one would select as the least likely of all countries to convert the rest, and was set up by means, the inefficacy of which it is not possible to exaggerate; or it was truly a REVELATION, and prevailed by the force of truth, illustrated by divine power. Surely those must be strangely blind to the light of moral evidence; must have a very partial acquaintance with the human heart, with the strength of established habits, particularly of practical habits of vice; who can attribute the actual effects of the Gospel in overcoming them, and introducing the most contrary habits, to anything except the overpowering and indisputable proofs of a divine commission, which the Apostles carried with them. We find men, who had been brought up in total ignorance of any future state, despising earthly things, and setting their affections on things above. We find men, who had hitherto acknowledged deities of human origin and human passions, obeying an invisible Creator of infinite holiness and purity. We find men, in short, cultivating and rearing a moral and religious character, which but a few years before had absolutely no pattern in existence; which they could not have imagined, because it was beyond the range of their conceptions; which they could not have imitated, because it was nowhere to be seen.[1]

[1] The circumstances of the early Christians are well described by Dr. Hey, Lecture i. xviii. "We should go to a meeting of the first Christians:

So that this dilemma lies before us: either the first followers of Christianity were men of totally different feelings and dispositions from any men whom we have ever known, and especially from ourselves, whom we know best; or they had irresistible evidence of the truth of those facts which form the basis of the religion. For that the Gospel, with the hopes and fears which it sets before us, and still more with the assistance it bestows, is able to effect this change, and create the character under consideration, is matter of undoubted experience. But those on whom it first produced this effect must have possessed undeniable evidence of its truth. It must have

plain, simple, and incommodious; concealed, in some degree, under alarm from danger of persecution: one such meeting we should find at least in every century, till the end of the seventh; we should hear the heathen conversing about the Christians in private life, and deliberating about them in councils of state; we should attend the tribunal of heathen magistrates, and hear the early Christians accused, defended, condemned: listen to the topics made use of in accusing and defending: we should attend the convicts to the stake, or the cross; see their mild fortitude, their heroic benevolence: or, first, we should attend them to prison, and see their fellow Christians crowding about them, giving up every sort of convenience, in order to afford them relief and support in their confinement. We should enter into the domestic retirements of those families who were wholly converted, and see their amiable virtues, or their animated piety: or of those which were become Christians in part, and see the conflicts between religious and filial duty; between Christian devotion and fraternal affection. We should see the zealous labours of the clergy; their minds inflamed with the greatness, the novelty, the danger of their situation: free from worldly views of gain, or rank, or power, wholly fixed upon heaven, and the means of attaining it; instructing, persuading, exhorting, convincing."

been proved to their satisfaction, (to the satisfaction of those, we should remember, whom it was impossible to deceive, if they had the use of their senses,) that the facts on which it rests really happened, and that the Apostles were commissioned to promulgate them to the world. Otherwise, it would have had no more influence upon them than it now has upon those who disown its authority; and indeed much less: for a religion once received and generally professed, has a manifest effect even on those who disbelieve it: but Christianity had no existence till converts from heathen idolatry and depravity exhibited it in their practice, and gave it a visible and beautiful reality by substantiating it in their lives. So that the faith of these first Christians is of very different weight, in the scale of evidence, from that of any modern opinion. Whoever, in the present day, thinks and lives as a Christian, proves no more than that the historical testimony by which Christianity is confirmed, confirms it to his individual satisfaction. But though we now believe on historical testimony, the first Christians did not; they believed on ocular demonstration, or on the personal evidence of those who had seen the things which we receive on their report: they had opportunities and means of inquiry within their reach, which set them above the possibility of mistake. Their conviction is the conviction of persons who could hardly be deceived, even if the error had been of a nature most gratify-

ing to their desires and feelings; but is quite beyond suspicion, when we know that all their desires and feelings must have risen in array against it, and inclined them to disbelieve.

Especially when another obstacle, which has hitherto been scarcely mentioned, opposed the reception of the Gospel. Those who embraced it, from the first hour of its announcement at Jerusalem to its final triumph over Paganism, were constantly subject to bitter persecution: persecution, which did not come upon them unexpectedly, after they had committed themselves in the cause, and gone too far to recede with credit; but was provided for in the first writings of the sect. They were forewarned of the consequences of their profession; they expected to suffer, and they consented to suffer. And though we may allow, that from the moment a man was convinced of the truth of Christianity, it became so all-important, that he would be ready to encounter any opposition; we can hardly deny that this opposition would ensure his hesitating, before he made either a rash or an insincere profession. Suppose a person, to whom the moral requirements of the Gospel presented nothing alarming. The fear of persecution would make him pause. Another might expect some present benefit in this new profession, if nothing appeared in the opposite scale; but no temporal advantage could recompense him for torture or death: so that the hypocrite was likewise excluded.

Martyrs, indeed, have fallen in every cause. Therefore we do not reckon it decisive in favour of a cause, that it is able to adduce a martyrology on its side. But we have a proof that men are sincerely convinced, when they are ready to seal their sincerity with their blood. In the present case, sincerity is nearly all we want: since what they attested was not matter of opinion, in which they were liable to error; but matter of fact, in which they could hardly be mistaken.

We are apt, I suspect, to undervalue the testimony of martyrs, from a vague notion of the dignity attending them; the dignity of perishing in a noble cause, applauded by innumerable partisans, and admired even by enemies. But no false lustre of this kind could dazzle the early Christians. The persecution which they underwent was of the most harassing and wearisome nature. It was the persecution of contempt, of reproach, of obloquy, alike undeserved and unanswerable. It subjected them abroad to the misery of constant insecurity; and at home to the continual bitterness of domestic opposition, to the taunts of nearest relations, and the tears of beloved friends.[1] There is nothing alluring in being daily held up to ridicule as an enemy to oneself, or to reproach as the author of injury to others. During a great portion of the three first centuries, if the

[1] A lively description of this is given in Justin, Apol. ii s. 2, &c.

Tiber overflowed its banks, or the Nile refused to overflow; if an eclipse, or an earthquake, or a dearth, or a pestilence occurred, the popular cry demanded vengeance on the Christians.[1]

To bigotry and inhumanity of this kind we owe those valuable remains of Christian antiquity, the apologies for their faith, presented by different writers from time to time to the emperors, who had the absolute power to spare or to destroy. The terms in which they are couched, the humility of their demands, and the evils of which they complain, are sufficient proof of what the Christians endured.[2]

These, then, are the grounds upon which I argue that the reception of Christianity proves the divine authority by which it was introduced and supported. I see an undeniable change, of a nature which I know from experience is the most improbable of all changes: a change in principle, and a change in practice; a change in religious sentiments, which are commonly maintained most pertinaciously; a change in daily habits of life, which are relinquished most unwillingly. I find new habits and new principles assumed in spite of known hostility, and preserved in spite of rigorous persecution. I want a cause; a cause to account for this. I find an explanation in the mira-

[1] So Tertullian feelingly complains, Apol. s. 20.

[2] I have treated the subject of persecution in this very general way, because I consider the argument arising from it as completely exhausted by Paley.

culous testimony borne to the religion, and in no thing else. Allowing such miraculous testimony, the consequence follows of course; denying it, the effec must remain for ever unexplained.

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE EFFECTS OF CHRISTIANITY.

When the question concerns the probability of truth in a revelation, we are irresistibly led to take into consideration its effects upon human happiness. Is it of such a nature as to improve the general condition of those to whom it is proposed? To raise or to depress the character of mankind? A revelation might possibly be made on such evidence as could not be rejected, which had no such beneficial tendency. But this at once strikes our reason as a case so improbable, that we feel it would require an unusual weight of positive testimony before a revelation could be accepted by us as divine, which did not bear witness to its origin by the excellence of its immediate effects.

At the same time, in every question of this kind, the object of the revelation must be kept in view. It will make an essential difference, whether a revelation professes to be designed to place men at once in a perfect state, or to lead them towards one. The Gospel nowhere professes to place men at once in

a perfect state. It professes to address those who are in an unhappy and guilty condition, naturally frail, and morally corrupt: a condition requiring that God should send his Son into the world, that the world through him might be saved. To such a condition it offers a remedy: not pretending to remove all the evils incidental to such a state; but promising, in behalf of those who put themselves under its guidance, to diminish and alleviate them.

Whoever refuses to bear this in mind, is incapable of forming a judgment respecting the operation of Christianity. A world exists, in which sin and sorrow are largely mixed up. To suppose that Christianity should take these altogether away, would be to suppose that it should create the world anew. It makes provision against them: it proposes a cure for them; and we can reasonably look for nothing more.

But there are other causes, independent of itself, of the partial benefits produced by Christianity. We have formerly seen, that the writers of the Gospel foresaw that its effects would always be inadequate to its inherent powers, and fall short of its avowed design, on account of the unwillingness of mankind to receive the remedy offered them. And to this obduracy we must in great measure attribute the evils which disfigure the face of Christianity. The first Christians, in particular, were taught to expect tribulation. And this tribulation was to come upon

them, because their brethren refused to listen to the Gospel, and chose to persecute those who did. No small portion of the difficulties which have always beset Christians, arises from a similar cause: from the too frequent discountenance which earnest piety and Christian circumspection meet with. The dread of this keeps multitudes still at a distance from God; and thus deprives them of the happiness resulting from the conscious possession of his favour, which nothing short of an entire devotion to his service can procure. And the feeling of this discouragement cannot but occasionally disturb the comfort of other more consistent believers.

The remainder of corruption adhering to those who do cordially embrace Christianity, is another cause of the imperfect happiness it procures to them. They have received an impression, with a force which nothing but the Christian religion could have employed, of the dreadful consequences of sin. They have declared war against it, and are striving for the mastery. But the enemy still makes head: is always restless; and will sometimes prevail. This cannot but occasion disquietude. A remedy is proposed to a diseased constitution; is accepted, and tried. But from the nature of the constitution, and the inveteracy of the disease, the effect of the remedy is incomplete. Still the patient, if not in perfect health, is in much better condition than he would have been without the remedy. And so none will

deny that the man who is struggling against his evil passions, and keeping them in subjection, is in a much better moral state than he would have been by giving loose to them: though he cannot enjoy that perfect tranquillity which might belong to a heart brought into complete conformity with the will of God.

These are among the reasons why Christians are often distinguished by a seriousness of deportment, which is ill understood by those who are strangers to their feelings, and misinterpreted as melancholy and gloom. Some persons are acutely sensible of that open ridicule, or even that silent contempt, with which religion is too often treated in the world. Others are tremblingly alive to those remains of corruption which they daily discover in their hearts, and afraid to take home to themselves a comfort which they fear it would be presumptuous to indulge. What shall we say then? To escape the censure of the thoughtless and profane, must principles be lowered down to a standard which none shall think too lofty? This will hardly be proposed; for we know that to whatever depth we descend, a lower depth will still remain; multitudes will still be found, for whom the meanest standard of religion is too high. Or will it be argued, that because a nature originally sinful cannot be altogether purified, therefore it should not be meddled with? That because evil propensities cannot be entirely subdued, there-

fore they should not be opposed? None will avow this; yet anxiety respecting the success of a contest against sin must be inseparable from such a contest; and those alone must be without such anxiety, who never resist their passions, or endeavour to regulate their hearts.

Let it be remembered, too, that most of the complaints concerning the melancholy tendency of religion are made by those who have no just sense of religious obligations; and who adopt their opinion from the demeanour of persons whom their own levity, neglect of God, and indifference about vice and virtue, must naturally render serious. Could they enter into the minds of those persons, or see them in their families, in their daily occupations, or on their beds, they would quickly perceive that Christianity has a cheerfulness and tranquillity belonging to it to which irreligion is a total stranger. The Christian is encouraged by the writings which he maintains to be divine, to look for "all joy and peace in believing;" and the expectation thus raised is commonly, and in most dispositions, fulfilled.

From these preliminary observations, I proceed to consider the beneficial tendency of the Gospel in a few distinct particulars.

The general benefits procured to the world by Christianity are very important, and such as nothing else anywhere received under the name of religion has produced. For a code of duties like that con-

tained in the Gospel is not limited in its effects to those who admit its divine authority. The existence of such a rule, and far more the existence of persons obeying it, has a general influence extending even to those who might seem removed beyond its reach; as the sun softens and brightens every object in the landscape, and not those alone upon which its rays directly shine. In this way a general improvement of habits has followed the progressive diffusion of the Gospel. The inhuman sports of the Roman amphitheatres were gradually discontinued; the most savage features of war have been softened; crimes of particular heinousness have become disgraceful in general opinion; the female sex has been raised to its just level in society; the duty of benevolence has been more commonly recognized and practised. Further, the severity of parental rule has been controlled; the barbarous custom of infanticide abolished; the system of domestic slavery has ceased, which subjected the greater part of mankind to the caprice and tyranny of a few freeborn masters, who regarded and treated the rest as inferior beings. These effects cannot with any justice be attributed to the progress of reason and civilization, because they are, in most instances, effects which directly proceed from the new views of the nature and destination of man unfolded by the Gospel; and, further, because this improvement of moral habits exists in countries very far inferior in literature and the arts to the

nations addicted to those habits which Christianity discountenanced; and because it follows the course and accompanies the growth of Christianity; being more and more visible as that is more and more received, and being most visible where Christianity is best understood, and embraced most cordially.

These effects of the religion have been often set forth at large; and every fresh example of its progress gives accumulated weight to the evidence arising from them. Instead of contenting myself with this general view, I shall descend to a few particulars, and consider the admirable adaptation of the Gospel to the exigencies of mankind individually.

I. There is a provision in the Gospel for comforting affliction. If a revelation is to be suited to the circumstances of human life, this quality must be amongst its indispensable requisites. Events occur in the lives of most persons—the whole life of others is of such a nature—as to admit of but one real comfort; namely, the assurance that they make part of a scheme which may prove the entrance to eternal glory. Those who disbelieve revelation are exposed to the same trials as other men; but what consolation belongs to the supposition that their afflictions are part of a general scheme, which the Creator has ordained as best upon the whole? The Deist who is brought into misfortune has no assurance that it may not be the divine pleasure to afflict

him. The Atheist, who is worn down by sickness, can only suppose that the general laws by which the world is governed bring that sickness upon him without remedy and without compensation. And although partial evil may be universal good, it is difficult to cherish such enlarged benevolence as to feel satisfied that the partial evil should fall upon ourselves.

The Gospel, however, speaks a very different language. It supplies an effectual comfort to the severest pain or the heaviest bereavement, by assuring the Christian that he is the object of tender interest and everlasting care; that he has a protector full of kindness and full of power, who will cause all things to contribute towards his spiritual good and eternal welfare. The Deist may be patient, no doubt, in acquiescence on supreme Providence; the Atheist may be silent, from a conviction of the uselessness of repining; but to call on either to rejoice in suffering, would be cruelty and folly. The Apostles, however, following the example of their Master, not unfrequently use this strong exhortation to Christians, that they should glory in tribulation;[1] that they should count it all joy when they fall into divers trials;[2] that they should deem themselves happy, if they suffer for righteousness' sake;[3] knowing that their light affliction, which is but for a moment, shall work for them a far more

[1] Rom. v. 3. [2] James i. 2. [3] 1 Peter iii. 14.

exceeding and eternal weight of glory.[1] And the consolation thus furnished is not imaginary, but real and substantial. It converts, in many instances, the most afflictive dispensations into a source of positive rejoicing. It lends a support to sickness and pain, which makes them appear more desirable than health itself. Incredible as this may sound to those who are strangers to the personal influence of Christianity; to those who have either experienced or witnessed it, it is a matter of certainty and reality, in which they cannot be mistaken.

It may be thought, indeed, that the incarnation of the Son of God was not required for a purpose like this; which might have been sufficiently answered by an assured declaration of the immortality of the soul, and a better world to come. Neither do we pretend that the alleviation of earthly afflictions would have afforded an adequate cause for a design so wonderful. But experience proves, that the indisputable assurance of the good-will of God towards men, declared by the mission of his Son; and the belief that he took upon himself our nature, and lived on earth as "a man of sorrows," to a degree far beyond what any of his followers are called to imitate him in,—ministers a support to the Christian, when suffering under affliction, which no other contemplation would enable him to realize.[2] The whole

[1] 2 Cor. iv. 17.

[2] The frequent use of this argument by the Apostles shows that they were well aware of its powerful influence. See 1 Pet. iii. 18; iv. 1. 2 Cor. viii. 9. Heb. ii. 17; iv. 15, 18. &c.&c.

dispensation is represented as one of pity and love. And we must believe, if it was divine, that all its consequences were foreseen and intended, as well as the one great consequence of calling men to repentance, and rescuing them from condemnation. Such beneficial effect, indeed, does not prove it to have been divine. But it adds something to the probabilities, on which its proper evidence is grounded.

II. Wherever the Gospel is made known, a regular provision exists for establishing religion in the world; that is, for bringing men to live in the knowledge and fear of God. Legislators in former times endeavoured to maintain a religious principle, confessedly for the sake of the public good. In order to establish this with additional authority, they pretended to be under the guidance of visions and revelations; and even the philosophers, who laughed at the popular superstitions, were still unwilling to demolish them, for want of something better in their stead.

Perhaps a conviction of this has been unfavourable to the interests of revelation, by causing it to be received with suspicion. It is understood, that a practical belief of Christianity will render men more contented subjects, and more diligent and useful members of society. Regulated by a rule more universal than that of any human laws, they will be restrained in circumstances to which the power of the civil magistrate does not extend; and directing their thoughts mainly to a state beyond the present,

they will not be easily drawn to interfere with government, or join the party of those who are "given to change," except in cases of extreme necessity. This undeniable fact has introduced a vague idea of some mutual understanding between the State and Christianity, and their reciprocal dependence upon each other. Whereas the Gospel was first introduced, and has often greatly flourished, in despite of bitter opposition from the ruling powers. We do not indeed deny that the State may benefit religion, or that religion may benefit the State: but we do deny that a divine revelation ought to suffer disparagement, because it contributes to the present advantage of mankind, and forms the strongest cement of civil society. In proportion as a serious argument would be raised against its authority, if its effects were different; an additional testimony is established in its favour, when it enforces salutary restraints to which men are not naturally inclined to conform.

If, then, it is desirable, as I may venture to assume, that men shall be governed by religious principles, Christianity is beneficial, inasmuch as, wherever it exists, it is constantly exerting a secret influence to this end. It provides that the child, from its very birth, should be dedicated to the service of God; not left to discriminate right from wrong by the slow process of observation, or the uncertain light of reason; not left to pursue its

natural bent, and strengthen passions by indulgence, that they may be afterwards imperfectly and reluctantly subdued; but made acquainted, at the dawn of reason and entrance of life, with the course to be pursued, and the conduct to be shunned. It provides for his understanding, from the first, the business and object of the present life, the real purpose of man's being. That the scene of this world is not final, but preparatory, if true, is the most important fact conceivable to every individual who bears a part in it. It is, therefore, most important that it should be known. Christianity makes it known; and by so doing, requires that the conduct should be regulated according to that conviction.

The duties, indeed, are often neglected, which can alone render such provisions effectual; they are neglected by parents, masters, and other superiors, whose business it is to teach these truths; and they are reluctantly received or listened to by those whose business it is to act upon them. But the religion itself orders otherwise, and is not in fault if its directions are disobeyed; which, if universally followed, and willingly heard, would render every being in a Christian country a disciple of Christ, and consequently a servant of God, and an heir of a blessed immortality.

Christianity, moreover, is constantly holding forth an encouragement to whatever things are honourable,

just, and pure: and discountenancing everything which tends to public injury, or private degradation. Whatever wickedness is committed in a Christian country, is committed in defiance of known obligations. Whatever irreligious conduct is practised, is practised in defiance of warning, instruction, and usually of conscience; unless the conscience has been blunted by continual neglect of its admonitions. Strong as the workings of passion are, and widely as the force of natural corruption prevails, still these checks must operate as a restraint, and weaken the impulse which refuses to be entirely controlled. We regret that the effect is less complete; but without dispute it is, as far it goes, altogether beneficial.

Further still, Christianity is issuing a constant summons to repentance. It declares what course of life the Creator of the world approves, and requires of his creatures, and the reverse of which he will not suffer them to pursue with impunity. But it delivers even this assurance in language suited to the actual character of human nature. It does not involve the disobedient in despair, by representing a return to favour as impossible. On the contrary, it affirms, that God will accept a change of heart, and treat the penitent as if he never had offended.

Indeed, among the leading peculiarities of the Gospel must be reckoned the freedom of admission to all its privileges which it offers to the penitent,

whatever may have been the degree or the nature of his transgressions. This is part of the original system: and conspicuously held forth as such in several remarkable parables. That of the lost sheep pourtrays in lively colours the way in which the consequences of sin and the necessity of repentance are brought home to the conscience, under the ministrations of the Gospel; how those who have long remained in a thoughtless, irreligious state, may be restored, through the atonement of Christ, to the divine favour.[1] The prodigal son describes the career of profligate dissipation which too many run, even of those who have been early taught by a Christian education to know the demands of God upon their obedience. It frequently happens, that these, in the day of affliction or adversity, consider the destitute estate to which they are reduced by departing from the God of their youth; having lost their earthly happiness, and finding nothing in its stead.[2] The willingness of God to receive, and assist, and complete their repentance, and to number them among his accepted children, is openly and explicitly declared. The parable of the labourers who are sent into the vineyard at different hours of the day, agrees with all experience as to the different periods of life in which religious impressions are made upon the mind; and summons every age to the service of God

[1] Luke xv. 3—7. [2] Luke xv. 11—32.

by the strongest incitement, the assurance of acceptance and reward.[1] These and other parables to the same purpose exemplify the leading and peculiar argument of the Gospel;—repent, and be forgiven, for the price of your redemption has been paid.

The suitableness of this to the condition of human nature will hardly be disputed. If the favour of God were limited to those who have continued stedfast in their allegiance, and made his laws the guide of their youth and life, mankind must either be a different race of beings, or the divine favour confined to a very small number. We cannot imagine a divine revelation which did not require a righteous and holy life. But we can conceive a revelation which allowed no repentance for an unrighteous or unholy life; while at the same time we see that such a revelation would be a source of despair rather than of comfort; would not be available to creatures like mankind; would confirm some in their sinful state, through want of inducement to reformation; and would condemn others to a hopeless remorse, when they reflected upon irretrievable transgression, and looked forwards to inevitable punishment. Considering the condition in which men are actually placed, by birth, circumstances, and irregular education, often conspiring to add fuel to a corrupt nature; we cannot hesitate to allow, that a revelation which admits re-

[1] Matt. xx. 1—16.

pentance, and contains a covenant of pardon, is the one most suitable, most beneficial to mankind.

We could not indeed call it beneficial, if that which offered comfort to transgressors proved an encouragement to sin. And some, in all ages, have brought this charge against Christianity; arraigning it on this very ground, as a religion which holds out an amnesty to the worst offenders.[1] Others, even of its friends, have shown a tacit acquiescence in this allegation, when they have systematically enforced the precepts rather than the doctrines of the Gospel, from the supposed danger of encouraging mankind to the abuse of mercy by the display of mercy. But Jesus "knew what was in man" better than those who call his wisdom in question; and founded his religion on the surest principles of expediency. Suppose the case, of a part of the inhabitants of a country in rebellion against their lawful sovereign. The object is, to reduce them to order and obedience; and how would that object most probably be answered;

[1] Celsus complained, that "Jesus Christ came into the world to make the most horrible and dreadful societies; for he calls sinners, and not the righteous: so that the body he came to assemble is a body of profligates separated from good people, among whom before they were mixed. He has rejected all the good, and collected all the bad."

"True," says Origen, "our Jesus came to call sinners:—but to repentance. He assembles the wicked:—but to convert them into new men; or rather, to change them into angels. We come to him covetous, he makes us liberal; unjust, he makes us equitable; lascivious, he makes us chaste; violent, he makes us meek; impious, he makes us religious."—See Origen contr. Cels. 1. iii. s. 59.

which would be the method most promising success; to make a public declaration of the duties of subjects, accompanied with a denunciation of grievous penalty against all who had violated them; or to issue a proclamation of amnesty to all who should return to their allegiance and persevere in future loyalty?[1] The method which, calmly considered, approves itself to our judgment, is the method pursued in the Gospel. And the method which approves itself to our judgment, is sanctioned by the results of our experience; and wherever it is simply acted upon, is daily swelling the triumphs of the Gospel with new converts to the service of God.

In this manner a constant experiment is in operation, wherever the Gospel is preached or read, upon the moral faculties. It is going on from youth to age; employing every motive by which the human heart can be swayed, and using every means by which it can be governed; teaching, exhorting, inviting, encouraging. No wiser system can be imagined, for beings naturally disposed to evil, and placed in circumstances of temptation. We can easily figure to our imaginations men differently constituted, or more securely fenced in. But for such moral agents as mankind actually are, we can desire no fitter dispensation.

[1] This illustration occurs in a preface, by Mr. Erskine, to an edition of Gambold's works.

III. I consider it as a third point deserving particular remark, that wherever the Gospel is established as the national religion, provision is made for elevating the general character of men, by raising them to a higher rank as intellectual beings. The condition of the bulk of mankind is inevitably poor and laborious; and we know the effect of poverty and labour, how they depress the mind, and keep it as it were stagnant, till it has neither inclination nor ability for reflection. Each succeeding generation is content to know what their fathers knew, and to practise what their fathers practised. The ennobling ideas of a Supreme Creator, of spiritual worship and pious love to be exercised towards him, of an eternal state of happiness and purity;—these ideas are far beyond them: their thoughts are chained down to the earth by daily wants and laborious occupations; and do not rise to higher things, except by the aid of some strong external impulse.

And yet experience proves that mankind are capable of high spiritual advancement: that laborious poverty, the common lot of the multitude, though it prevents them from discovering, does not prevent them from receiving, the greatest and noblest truths; and that employments whose natural tendency is rather to depress than to elevate the mind, may yet be conducted on principles which dignify the lowest stations and the meanest pursuits. Few will venture to deny, that if men are capable of

such improvement, it is desirable they should attain it, as exalting their rank in the scale of being. And this is effected by the agency of Christianity. From its first establishment, when the Apostles ordained elders in every church, Christianity has provided bodies of men, whose business it is to instruct the ignorant; to awaken them from torpor and stupidity; to rouse their attention to matters of the highest dignity and importance.[1] Not to remove them from their stations and natural duties, which indeed would be impossible if it were desirable, and undesirable even if it were possible; but to inculcate principles which may soften the roughest, and sweeten the bitterest, and exalt the humblest, of human labours.

Now all this is clear gain, and to be set to the account of the Gospel. Nothing of the kind was ever known or thought of in ancient times, at least beyond the narrow limits of Judea.[2] We are apt to forget this, and to consider advantages of this kind

[1] The benefit of the Christian system, in this respect, was so evident to the Emperor Julian, that he attributed the success of the religion in some measure to the sanctity and zeal of its ministers; and supposed, that by an imperial ordinance, he could command the same qualities in the heathen priests.—See his letter to Arsacius, in Sozomen. l. x. c. 16; or Lardner's Heath. Test. c. 46.

[2] "Useful as we now know social religion to be to states and kingdoms, it is unlikely that any state should, merely by its own internal wisdom, have instituted a good church, with right provisions, laws, religious exercises, and discipline. Politicians would scarcely *think* of such a thing. Intent on wars, alliances, commerce, taxation, commodious passage of travellers, &c.; religious society must come from

no less of course, than to enjoy the light and breathe the air of heaven. We are so generally accustomed to the instruction of our people, in consequence of what Christianity has done, that we forget to ascribe the benefit to Christianity. We have no idea of the mass of mankind being wholly neglected; being never exhorted to seek religious knowledge: still less of their seeking it in vain. But in the heathen world, there were none whose office it was to teach, even if there had been any who could have taught what it was most desirable to learn. Philosophical lectures were attended by some of the richer class; but by no others. One philosopher alone, of all we read of, seems to have been conscious of some moral obligation in the employment of his extraordinary talents;[1] and he addressed himself to the higher ranks. Had it been otherwise, the philosophers in the several ages were but few; so few, that supposing they were dispersed, and that every man had the liberty of attending them, we should be astonished to calculate the average distance which a person must have travelled in order to get instruction. Further, there could be no unity of doctrine,

religious zeal, though afterwards courted by the State."—Hey's Lectures. If the State, even when administered by professors of Christianity, can afford very little attention or support to the interests of religion: we could hardly expect that it should step out of its way to establish, in the first instance, religious instruction.

[1] *Πρῶτον μὲν δὴ περι θεους ἐπειρατο σωφρονας ποιειν τους συνοντας.* Xenoph. de Socrate. Memorab. l. iv. 3. iii.

because there was no unity of opinion.[1] The very foundation of religion is an intelligent Creator. Philosophers could not lay this groundwork, when they disagreed about the fact; some holding the world to be the work of chance, and others maintaining its eternity. They could not teach moral duties; for besides that they were unsettled as to the nature and extent of these, the one great sanction of moral duty, the declaration of God's will, was necessarily wanting to their instructions. They could not assert

[1] "The matters wherein the philosophers differed, were points which concern the very being of religion and virtue; and those differences rendered the motives and obligations to both, precarious and uncertain. And this shows how unjust the objection is which infidels raise upon this head from the different opinions among Christians. It will appear, that the several denominations of Christians agree, both in the substance of religion, and in the necessary enforcements of the practice of it: that the world and all things in it were created by God, and are under the direction and government of his all-powerful hand and all-seeing eye: that there is an essential difference between good and evil, virtue and vice; that there will be a state of future rewards and punishments, according to our behaviour in this life; that Christ was a teacher sent from God, and that the Apostles were divinely inspired; that all Christians are bound to declare and profess themselves to be his disciples; that not only the exercise of the several virtues, but also a belief in Christ, is necessary in order to their obtaining the pardon of sin, the favour of God, and eternal life; that the worship of God is to be performed chiefly by the heart, in prayers, praises, and thanksgivings; and as to all other points, that they are bound to live by the rules which Christ and his Apostles have left in the Holy Scriptures. Here then is a fixed, certain, and uniform rule of faith and practice; containing all the most necessary points of religion, established by a divine sanction, embraced as such by all denominations of Christians, and in itself abundantly sufficient to preserve the knowledge and practice of religion in the world."—Gibson's Second Pastoral Letter.

a future retribution, because none believed it; all wandering in universal scepticism, or being lost in vague conjecture. The public rites of worship, which the people did attend, were rather calculated to corrupt than to improve them; and consisted wholly of ceremonies performed by the priests, without any moral exhortations or lessons of duty.[1]

Christianity, on the other hand, by means of its accredited agents, is constantly making an aggressive movement against that indolence and indifference respecting all things not immediately present and visible, in which the minds of the generality are sure to repose when left to themselves. And the effect of this excitement is wonderfully powerful, notwithstanding the imperfect degree in which it necessarily acts from the nature of those who are the objects of its operation, and of those who are concerned in carrying it on. We can form a judgment of its power, and of the dependence of mankind upon it, from the ignorance and barbarism which prevailed throughout Europe during that long and dark period when the Scriptures were virtually sealed up, and the priests deserted their duty of instruction, at least of useful and evangelical instruction. No sooner was the book of revelation again unlocked, and education promoted, and inquiry

[1] Besides Leland's "Advantage of Revelation," this subject is ably handled in Bishop Gibson's Second Pastoral Letter, and concisely touched on in Hey's Lectures, book i. ch. xix.

stimulated, and divine philosophy laid open to the people, than the faculties of mankind were sharpened and their views enlarged, and a new order of things began which has changed the face of Protestant Europe. On the same extensive scale we still discern the effect of this energy, in the difference between those countries where religious instruction is effectually afforded, and the Scriptures actually understood, and those which possess these advantages in an inferior degree, or in no degree at all. If a map could trace the real influence of the Gospel, it would also delineate the proportion of intelligence and active virtue. The measure of spiritual ignorance and of spiritual knowledge is also the measure of barbarism and of civilization, of mental stupidity or mental illumination.

But the case becomes stronger and clearer when we regard it on a more limited scale, and attend to the individual rather than the general effect; and perceive the difference which is made in a single district, or a single family, or even in a single character, wherever the declarations of the Gospel are faithfully believed.

Looking towards the lower orders of society, we find that excess gives way to temperance; that patience succeeds to discontent; that industry is pursued with cheerfulness; that general good-will takes the place of envy and malice; and a kindly charitable feeling is exercised, not capriciously, but

on principle. Such is the first effect of religious influence. By degrees the faculties become enlarged; the mind possesses a grasp of which it had once seemed incapable; the conscience, no longer insensible to right and wrong, except in the most glaring cases, acquires a moral acuteness which needs no rules of casuistry; and the mind exhibits a clearness of perception, and a nice discrimination of truth and falsehood, which might appear to be the last result of philosophical investigation, if it were not seen in those who have no leisure for investigation, and no education in philosophy.[1]

[1] "In Loskiel's account of the Moravian Missions among the North American Indians, I have found a striking illustration of the uniformity with which the grace of God operates upon man. Crantz, in his account of the Missions in Greenland, had shown the grace of God working on a *man-fish*, on a stupid, sottish, senseless creature, scarcely a remove from the fish on which he lived. Loskiel shows the same grace working on a *man-devil*—a fierce, bloody, revengeful warrior, dancing his infernal war-dance with the mind of a fury. Divine grace brings these men to the same point. It quickens, stimulates, and elevates the Greenlander; it raises him to a sort of new life; it seems almost to bestow on him new senses; it opens his eye, and bends his ear, and rouses his heart; and what it adds it sanctifies. The same grace tames the high spirit of the Indian; it reduces him to the meekness, and docility, and simplicity of a child. The evidence arising to Christianity from these facts is, perhaps, seldom sufficient by itself to convince a gainsayer; but to a man who already believes, it greatly strengthens the reasons of his belief."—Cecil's Remains.

These reflections, corroborated as they are by still more recent instances, are well worthy the consideration of such persons as object to the employment of missionaries in countries yet uncivilized on the ground of their want of preparation to receive Christian truth. No engine of civilization has as yet been discovered which bears comparison with the Gospel when preached in its native purity and simplicity.

This is a proof both of the excellence and truth of Christianity, which its ministers necessarily enjoy beyond others. When they observe the power which it has, and which nothing else has, of elevating the mind and enlarging its faculties; when they see the Gospel prove to the sincere Christian a safe and ready test of thought, discourse, and action; when they see it furnishing him with additional sources of gratitude in prosperity, and a never-failing consolation in sorrow: when they see it raising him to an elevation of thought and a consistency of conduct which lifts him above his natural rank, and all this the sole effect of Christian knowledge, they possess an assurance of the divine origin of the religion, which is stronger than the soundest argument, and which the most elaborate sophistry can never shake. This, indeed, is a proof which belongs chiefly to the teachers of Christianity; and it is a needful encouragement to them among many anxieties and disappointments. But although it is theirs principally, it is not theirs exclusively. Much satisfaction of the same kind is within the reach of every one who has ever beheld Christianity in practical operation.

I have been alluding to the lower orders, the great bulk of mankind. In the higher ranks, which have access to other modes of improvement and instruction, the results of a Christian faith may seem less decidedly and evidently marked. But it will be

found, on inquiry, that a comparative indifference to the honours and pleasures of the world, a sense of responsibility concerning the employment of the various talents of time, wealth, and influence, an active charity, a spirit of humility and condescension, a lively interest in whatever regards the moral or temporal welfare of others, belongs, in an eminent and singular degree, to the disciples of Christianity. We cannot contemplate such a character without acknowledging its intrinsic excellence. But, to make a fair estimate, we ought to compare this character with what would otherwise have existed in its stead: we ought to remember that, speaking generally, what is benevolence would have been selfishness; what is charity would have been indifference; what is lowliness would have been arrogance and pride; what is moderation would have been intemperate luxury, if the virtues had not been substituted for the vices through the influence of Christianity.

These results are daily arising from the Christian religion, and have done so, in a greater or less degree, from the period of its first promulgation. They are either the consequences of a design contrived by divine wisdom for the benefit of man, or the accidental effects of an imposture undertaken for no assignable motive by uneducated enthusiasts. But surely it contradicts all probability or experience, to believe that a scheme so vague and empi-

rical as that of the Apostles must have been, if they did not act upon divine authority, should have proved so suitable to mankind, so effectual towards the object which it professes, and so beneficial to the world at large.

This, however, like every other difficulty which has been shown in the preceding treatise, to embarrass the hypothesis which ascribes Christianity to human invention, vanishes at once when the divine origin of the religion is admitted. We should then expect that it would prove efficient for all those purposes which are actually answered by it; that it would console the anxieties, trials, and sorrows to which human life is inevitably subject; that it would provide for the dedication of the powers and faculties of mankind to the will and service of their Maker; that it would propose a way for restoring the disobedient to his favour; and, further, that it should be found suitable to every age, and condition, and climate, and capable of improving the general character wherever it was received. And all this it is constantly effecting. Systems confessedly of human origin make no approach towards these results. We see no reason to wish all men Stoics; or all men Epicureans; or all men Mohammedans; or all men Polytheists; or all men Atheists. But no one who has ever witnessed, with impartial eyes, the operation of Christianity in a single family, or a single individual, can resist the

inference, that if the spirit of the Gospel were universal, and all men were practical Christians, there would be little left to complain of even in this imperfect world.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSION.

THE preceding chapters have been intended to establish a strong moral evidence of the truth of Christianity. Whether we consider the doctrines introduced by its Author:—their originality in his nation; their originality in the world;—and yet the confirmation which they receive from many singular facts, singular enactments, and minute prophecies contained in the Jewish Scriptures:—Or whether we consider the internal evidence of the Christian writings:—their language; their anticipation of conduct subsequently developed, and their general wisdom:—Or whether we consider the peculiar character formed under the influence of Christianity; its excellence in individuals; its beneficial effects upon mankind; and its suitableness to their condition as dependent and corrupt beings:—Or whether we consider the rapidity with which a religion so pure, so self-denying, so humiliating, and so uncompromising, was propagated and embraced, even in the face of bitter hostility:—we have phenomena which nothing, except the truth of the religion, can adequately explain. Except on this supposition, it would

be difficult to account for any one of these several facts. But either we must believe that not one only, but all of these improbable facts concur to deceive us:—or Jesus Christ did appear in the world, and bear the character which he claimed of Mediator between God and man;—did suffer the penalty due to human transgression;—and does redeem from that penalty as many as "receive him," and commit themselves to his care.[1]

It must always be borne in mind, that this is the assertion made throughout the Gospel. Jesus is either the Redeemer of the world, or he is nothing. That he professed to be. That his supernatural birth, his miraculous power, his peculiar death, his predicted resurrection, were designed to prove him. Unless then he is that, his professions are untrue, and the whole authority of his religion falls to the ground. We cannot distinguish between his doctrines and his precepts. We cannot deny his mysterious divinity, and retain his moral supremacy. The precepts and the doctrines are connected together, and depend upon one another. Why should we practise sobriety? why enforce purity, or humility, or any other characteristic of Christianity, because it is recommended by Jesus of Nazareth, unless Jesus of Nazareth were indeed the Son of God, and requires these qualities as a preparation for that future kingdom which he came to reveal, and offers to his followers?

[1] John i. 12.

What, therefore, the preceding evidence proves, if it prove anything, is, that the Gospel is a message of reconciliation from God to man, proposed by Christ in the character of their Reedeemer. And what those reject, who are not living as the disciples of Christ by a vital and practical faith, is the offered means of restoration to the favour of their Creator.

Perhaps it may be thought, that if the responsibility were so awful, the evidence would be more irresistible.

1. But in answer to this, it must be remembered, that if the Christian Scriptures are true, and give a faithful account of the mission of Christ and its design, the evidence of it which we actually possess is the only conceivable evidence by which it could be confirmed to us. Jesus could not have put on human nature, or have suffered the punishment of human transgressions, in every country, and in every age. Yet, unless he had done so, unless he had been personally seen by every individual who might be required to believe in him, the rest of the world, those who were not witnesses of his incarnation must have received the revelation on exactly the same evidence as declares it to us now; that is, on human testimony. If the eighteenth century were substituted for the age of Augustus, if any country of the world were substituted for Judea, all but the comparatively few inhabitants of that country which might be chosen for the scene of his appearance must receive

by report what they could not possibly learn from ocular demonstration. So that the assertion sometimes hazarded, that if God made a revelation at all, he would render its truth indisputable to every individual, is to assume the fact in question; to assume that Christianity is not true; since it is impossible that such a revelation as that of the Gospel should be communicated in any other way than that in which we have actually received it.

Will it be argued, that for that very reason Christianity cannot be true? Surely not. Because as the sort of evidence which assures us of Christ's incarnation is the same evidence as that on which we act in every other concern of life, it may reasonably be taken as the proper evidence of religion. In order to be certain of the existence of America or India, I do not require the countries to be set before my eyes; it is enough if I possess the testimony of those who have visited and seen them. Indeed, there are few affairs of common life in which we are not obliged to shape our course, as best we may, often through conflicting testimony. I am not aware that any counter-evidence can be adduced against the multiplicity of proofs in favour of Christianity. No one is able, no one pretends to be able, to deny any one of the facts brought forward in the preceding chapters. Nor can any opposite facts be alleged against them. Nothing can be alleged except the supposed improbability of this or of any other revelation; a ground of argument

which we at once perceive it is extremely dangerous to admit in contradiction to positive circumstances, even if the argument were stronger in itself than it has appeared to be on reasonable consideration.[1]

2. But, further, the very fact that the proofs of Christianity are to be sought with pains and ascertained by diligent inquiry, is in favour of its truth, because it is a fact which harmonizes with the general character of the divine government.

This is manifest, on the most superficial view. The truth which forced itself upon the mind of the heathen poet, whilst contemplating the labours of agriculture, and the obstacles which impede their success, is a truth which meets us at every turn in our survey of the world.

> PATER IPSE colendi
> Haud facilem esse viam voluit:
> Nec torpere gravi passus sua regna veterno.[2]

Without experience, we should doubtless consider it improbable that so large a proportion of life would be occupied in obtaining such education as is necessary to the useful employment of maturer years. Yet we do not, on this account, suppose it to be the design of God that men should not improve their faculties by education. Without experience, again, we should hardly be led to imagine that by far the greatest portion of the human race, in every age, and country, and state of civilization,

[1] See ch. ix.

[2] Virg. Georg. i. 121.

would be obliged to devote their time to the providing of food and clothing. We should expect that wants so universal and so indispensable would be supplied in some easier manner. Yet no one is guilty of the absurdity of arguing, that if God had intended his creatures to be fed and clothed, he would have rendered food and raiment more readily procurable. It seems to me no way more extraordinary, that men must study the proofs of religion in order to be convinced of its divine authority, or learn the nature of religion in order to live conformably to it; than that a man must think, and forecast, and labour through many months, before he can procure for himself the materials of a day's clothing, or of a single meal suited to a state of civilization.

The metals and other mineral productions, so useful, and almost indispensable to mankind;—the sciences by which their nature is highly improved; —and in particular the knowledge of medicine, which is often needed to preserve and continue their existence;—are all obvious instances of the late discovery and tedious or difficult acquisition of things in the highest degree desirable to man; and fully justify the conclusion, that if pains must be used for the right understanding of religion, nothing appears in that dispensation contrary to the usual and acknowledged system of Divine Providence.

3. I shall only observe, further, that to argue as if the proofs of a revelation must necessarily be intuitive or self-evident, is to assume that man is not, and cannot be, placed in a state of probation. If he is in such a state, he may be tried by the disposition of his mind towards religion, as well as in any other way. We freely acknowledge the necessity that the evidence of a divine revelation should appear; on a candid examination, unanswerably strong; and few, I apprehend, will deny this with respect to the evidences of Christianity. But it is not necessary that these proofs should be flashed upon every mind, as in the case of St. Paul, with the rapidity of lightning; so that a man should have no more power over his creed, and consequently no more responsibility concerning it, than he has to determine his complexion, or the country in which he shall be born.

And the mode in which the Christian religion must be listened to, in order that it may be received, and studied in order that it may be understood, is well calculated to bring into exercise that disposition of mind which is suitable to a being in circumstances like those of man, applying to the subject of religion. This is not a disposition which makes no inquiry, or demands no evidence, or feels no hesitation; but which confines evidence to its proper business of ascertaining facts; and does not so lend itself to prejudice, or adhere to prepossessions, as virtually

to exclude revelation, and make its own religion. This is the disposition with which the whole subject of religion must be approached; not the evidences only, which lead us to the threshold of the temple; but the Bible itself, which conducts us within the vestibule. We must guard against a critical, captious spirit. We must be aware that the ways of God are far above out of our sight; and be ready to receive divine instruction with the humility and teachableness of the tenderest years. Surely there is enough of ignorance and enough of evil discoverable in the mind of man, to show that he needs illumination from above, and to set him upon earnest prayer to the Author of "every good and perfect gift," that in matters relating to God and to eternity, he may be enabled to exercise his understanding humbly, and with proper deference to divine wisdom. Those who inquire thus will find the Bible its own best evidence; carrying with it marks of divine origin, which can neither, perhaps, be easily described nor accurately defined; but are not the less indisputable and infallible. Reason would lead us to expect what experience uniformly proves: that "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant."[1]

[1] Psalm xxv. 14.

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX No. 1. P. 81.

It is no argument against the typical actions or typical ceremonies of the Old Testament, as if they had failed in the purpose which they were intended to effect, that their first object was not understood among the Jews. Type being a species of prophecy, can no more be explained before the appearance of the antitype, than a prophecy can be interpreted until accomplished by the event which it foretells. Indeed, we are only warranted to affirm that the type and the antitype are connected together, whenever we find it so declared by the Scriptures themselves. For it is not the mere resemblance of two facts or circumstances which prove their mutual connexion, unless it can be made to appear that the resemblance has been originally so designed. "The only means of knowing that two distinct, though similar, historic facts, were so connected in the

general scheme of Divine Providence that the one was designed to prefigure the other, is the authority of that work in which the scheme of Divine Providence is unfolded. Whatever persons or things, therefore, recorded in the Old Testament, were expressly declared by Christ or his Apostles to have been designed as prefigurations of persons or things related in the New Testament, such persons or things, so recorded in the one, are types of the persons or things with which they are compared in the other." [1]

It follows, that the argument in the text can only be urged against the Sceptic, as showing coincidences which, when taken together, he must find it difficult to explain. We who acknowledge the authority of the Scriptures, affirm on that authority that the Brazen Serpent, the Paschal Lamb, the sacrifices of the Law, were all intended to bear reference to the One great sacrifice pre-ordained from the beginning. But we cannot venture positively to pronounce the same of the intended sacrifice of Isaac, however striking the resemblance; though our Church has set the example by selecting the account in Genesis for the services of Good Friday.

[1] Bishop Marsh, Lecture xviii.

APPENDIX No. II. P. 115.

Among the many assertions thrown out at random in the volume of "Essays and Reviews," that alluded to in the text is remarkable. There it is said: "For any of the higher or supernatural views of inspiration, there is no foundation in the Gospels or Epistles. There is no appearance in their writings that the Evangelists or Apostles had any inward gifts, or were subject to any power external to them, different from that of preaching or teaching, which they daily exercised; nor do they anywhere lead us to suppose that they were free from error or infirmity." [1]

Were this account agreeable to fact, it would bring equal discredit upon Jesus and upon his Apostles. It would lead us to suppose that Jesus had declared the most important truths, and delivered the most important precepts, to the few, the comparatively few followers who attended him on earth, and yet had made no provision for the communication of those truths to the world through future time. This would imply less than human wisdom. For even St. Peter endeavoured that Christians should "be able, after his decease, to have the things which he had taught them always in remembrance." [2]

[1] Essay VII., p. 345. [2] 2 Peter i. 12.

The revelation made by Jesus could only avail for its purpose, by being truthfully recorded, through the testimony of those who had perfect understanding of all things from the first, and from the beginning were "eye-witnesses and ministers of the word."[1] Therefore Jesus had prepared his Apostles for this office. He warned them to "take heed what they heard,"[2] and to measure it out faithfully; for to them "it was given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God."[3] He had encouraged them by saying, "When they bring you unto the synagogues, and magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say; for the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye shall say."[4] Again; "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth."[5] "He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." After his resurrection, "he expounded unto them, beginning at Moses and all the prophets, the things concerning himself;"[6] things "pertaining to the kingdom of God,"[7] which, until all had been accomplished, they "could not hear," or understand. At last, when he gave them his commission to "go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature," he promised to be "with

[1] Luke i. 2. [2] Mark iv. 24 and 12. [3] Ibid. xii. 11.
[4] John xvi. 12. [5] John xiv. 22. [6] Luke xxiv. 27. [7] Acts i. 3.

them alway;" for they should be his "witnesses" to declare unto the uttermost parts of the earth, "the things which they had seen and heard."[1]

Throughout his epistles, we find St. Paul declaring the fulfilment of these promises in his own person; declaring that the Thessalonians, in receiving the word of God, which they heard of him, "received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God."[2] He writes to the Corinthians—"Those things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, God has revealed to us by his Spirit;" and, again: "We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God."[3] Again: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God, who hath made us able ministers of the New Testament."[4] He particularly asserts that the things which he "delivered" unto the Corinthians concerning the Lord's Supper, he "had received of the Lord;"[5] and that "the Gospel which he preached, he neither received of man, neither was taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."[6]

Quotations to the same purpose might be multiplied to a wide extent; but enough has been alleged to show the contradiction between the facts of the case, and the strange assertion that there is "*no*

[1] Acts i. 8; iv. 20. [2] 1 Thes. ii. 13. [3] 1 Cor. ii. 9—12.
[4] 2 Cor. iii. 4, 5. [5] 1 Cor. xi. 23. [6] Gal. i. 12.

foundation in the Gospels or Epistles for any of the higher or supernatural views of inspiration." For what can be a higher degree of inspiration than is claimed, when St. Paul declares, that God had "revealed to him by his Spirit" things beyond man's conception, even "the deep things of God;" that he had received of the Lord himself the doctrines of the Gospel; and that he preached not his own word, but "the word of God"?

With such declarations before us, not made in a formal manner, as articles of a Creed, but interwoven with the whole texture of the writings, how can it be denied that there is anything in the writings of the Evangelists or Apostles which might "*lead us to suppose that they were free from error or infirmity?*"

We have not so read their writings. But we can understand, better than before, how one, who has so read and so misinterpreted them, can have conceived the singular idea that St. Paul and his brother Apostles had fabricated the doctrine of the atonement, and made their own word, and not the word of God, the foundation of their teaching.[1] If they were not exempt by a superintending grace from involuntary "*error*," they might not be exempt from the "*infirmity*" of representing their own views as "the counsel of God." But if we admit this, nothing remains but to close our Bibles. We have "followed a cunningly-devised fable."

[1] Professor Jowett on Romans, ii. 475.

APPENDIX No. III. P. 223.

I take advantage of some remarks which have appeared whilst this work was in the press, to confirm the general argument of the last chapter.

"With the Bible open before us, well versed in its contents, agreeing in the main not only in the principles of its interpretation, but even in the use of the very same words and phrases as expressive of the truths which it reveals, we shall still be found to regard those truths in very different aspects,—even to attach totally opposed ideas to the formulæ by which the Church has guarded them, according to our knowledge or ignorance of the wants of human hearts. Let this be considered, that if we form a high estimate of the unaided moral powers of man, and see not how sin has blighted them; if sin appears to us rather as an irregularity than as a pestilence, and we have no deep conviction of its loathsomeness and hatefulness in the sight of the All Holy,—if we perceive no very great difference, in point of moral value, between the life of a heathen hero and a Christian saint, and express ourselves, therefore, in very different terms from St. Paul as to the perfection of the Christian character; being satisfied to hold up as the model, a well-run course of usefulness and benevolence, which has given no sign of the spiritual life within,—if we thus show practically, however we

may theorize, that we are contented with what adorns this passing life, without attaching it by unseen cords to the world above and the life eternal,—then, forming a very inadequate conception of the wants of the human soul, we are likely also to err greatly in interpreting what the Bible tells us of their remedy. If a man is convinced, in the depths of his own consciousness, and perceives manifested in the thousand forms of sin and misery around him, that whatever marks of its godlike origin his nature bears, it is greatly estranged from God;—if he knows that sin, clinging closely to him from his birth, and ever springing up afresh within him, even when it seems most completely vanquished, does in very truth build up some barrier, insurmountable by human strength, between his soul and God;—he will rejoice to welcome the simple truth, that the sacrifice of the death of Christ was offered to remove this barrier. He may not, perhaps, trouble himself with speculations as to whether this sacrifice was necessitated by God's justice or his love; he may not be able to tell what great master of theology—Anselm or Aquinas, or Luther or Hooker—has best set forth in logical form the truth for which his heart yearns; but he will welcome it as breathing through all the New Testament, ever sounding, especially from the lips of that Apostle, the memory of whose early life made him feel and confess himself the chief of sinners, and therefore hopeless without Christ's

sacrifice. He will find that, if he could only enter into that deep loathing with which penitent David looked back on the sin that had debased him, the doctrine of an atoning sacrifice would become a necessity in his theology. To the formalist a stumbling block, and to the intellectualist foolishness, this doctrine, to him whose heart is deeply convinced of sin, becomes the truest manifestation, both of the power of God and of the word of God."—*Dangers and Safeguards, by Bishop of London.*

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